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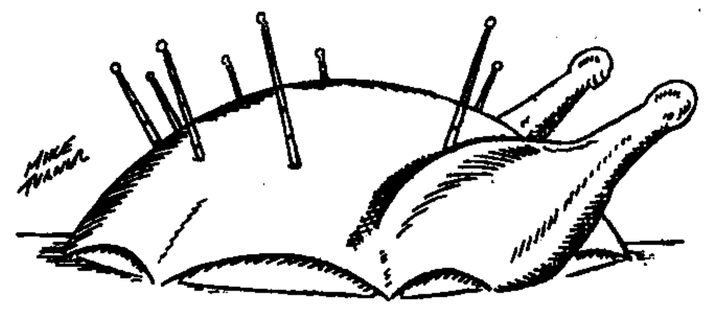

The world's biggest turkey

THE freight train derailment near Northampton late last month exposed another area where money has come before safety. The derailed wagons were dragged four miles before the train driver realised something was amiss, leaving a long section of busy commuter line in need of repairs.

The guard's van at the rear of freight trains was axed many years ago, when BR was under pressure to cut costs from the government and its chums in the greedy, unsafe and highly subsidised road-haulage industry. There has also been a long-term reduction in signallers along main lines, who kept an eye on each train as it proceeded. To save money, signal control is centralised.

The railway's fragmentation has also reduced the rail staff who would raise the alarm over defective trains. In the bad old days even junior station staff would get a grounding in the rules of train operation and be told to watch trains as they passed by. Now that many stations have no staff at all and companies like Virgin have dumbed-down platform jobs, a train could travel many miles with a safety defect, such as no red lamp at the rear, and no-one would be any the wiser.

BOUYGUES, the French building firm cited most often in the corruption scandal engulfing president Jacques Chirac of France, is of course a favourite over here with Tony Blair's "new" Labour.

Chirac is tainted by allegations that over many years various construction giants paid huge bribes, sometimes in cash-stuffed suitcases, to his RPR political party in return for contracts. His former aide Michel Roussin has been jailed and the RPR's alleged unofficial "treasurer", Louise Yvonne Cassetta (nicknamed "The Purse"), has been arrested, released and rearrested.

In Britain, Bouygues (which is also at the centre of various corruption scandals in Africa), has been given the contract to run King's College London under a private finance initiative (PFI) deal, and to run Barnet General Hospital for 25 years.

Labour's most spectacularly appropriate job for the French firm, however, was to make it "preferred bidder" for the £100m PFI contract to rebuild the new HQ for the home office and prison service at Queen Anne's Gate in July. Who will run the new centres when they are built? Bouygues of course.

Vivendi is the other building firm frequently mentioned in the Chirac scandal. It has been linked to misappropriation of funds, the unfair division of contracts to avoid competitive tendering and the payment of 2 percent levies on building contracts to France's four main political parties.

Whatever the truth of the allegations, Vivendi is certainly keen on giving financial support to "new" Labour and its related organisations through its principal UK subsidiaries Onyx, SARP and the train company Connex.

Once upon a time Labour objected to all these firms. Back in the early 90s Mo Mowlam and David Blunkett attacked Onyx and the privatisation of rubbish collection in parliament. And SARP, which runs a troubled waste dump near Sheffield, attracted local Labour criticism too. Last December SARP was fined £120,000 plus £150,000 costs for allowing two clouds of toxic chemicals to escape from the dump.

THE US election fiasco has provided the *Eye's* favourite computer company, EDS, with an ideal opportunity for self promotion.

Electronic Disaster Systems (*sic*) took out a page advert in the *Wall Street Journal* featuring a blown up US ballot paper with the caption: "Nothing is too complex for us to solve." The small print read: "Antiquated systems can cause costly mistakes, unsatisfactory outcomes and unhappy customers. Fortunately EDS can design, implement and manage even your most complex systems to ensure the highest level of accuracy and customer trust."

The Bank of Scotland has a complex problem for EDS to solve right now, oddly enough. Why have 15 people, including two former employees of EDS, been arrested in Milton Keynes in recent weeks in connection with £228,000 taken fraudulently from the bank between 1998 and August 2000, on whose behalf EDS was doing admin work at the time?

MORE on the planned construction of the Ilisu dam in Turkey by a consortium which includes the British building company Balfour Beatty (see *Eyes passim*). If it goes ahead, up to 78,000 Kurds could be made homeless – three times the original estimate.

Construction depends in part on whether the UK government decides to underwrite the project by £200m. Trade minister Stephen Byers says the grant will not be paid until Turkey fulfils certain conditions. In the meantime two independent reports state that the resettlement plans currently in place are unlikely to work, and that the plans for the dam do not meet international criteria. Even the Commons select committee for trade and industry has said the compensation on offer to the Kurds is completely insufficient.

Nevertheless, in a letter responding to the dam's critics, Balfour Beatty chairman Lord Weir responds sensitively: "What disappoints me most and indeed, saddens me is that most NGOs [non-governmental organisations of the kind which produced the two aforementioned reports] have decided to take so completely confrontational a stance on Ilisu. This seems to me not merely wrong-headed but morally wrong."

Balfour Beatty was of course also the firm chosen to convert the former MoD barracks at Oakington, near Cambridge, into a "reception centre" for asylum seekers, which opened last March. By a bitter twist of fate, some of the first arrivals were Iraqi Kurds.

LORD Carter, "new" Labour's chief whip in the Lords, is evidently unaware of government plans to stamp out drunken yobbish behaviour.

Carter was asked to admonish unruly peer Lord Brookman who, after one too many in his local, had marked his displeasure at not getting into the local golf club by flooring club member Michael Cook.

But loutish behaviour by their Lordships outside of the House is, according to Carter, "not within my sphere of responsibility". Brookman, however, was willing to submit to restorative justice. He admitted "pushing not punching" Mr Cross and told the *Eye* he has sent an apology and £238 for a new pair of glasses.

"On second thoughts..."

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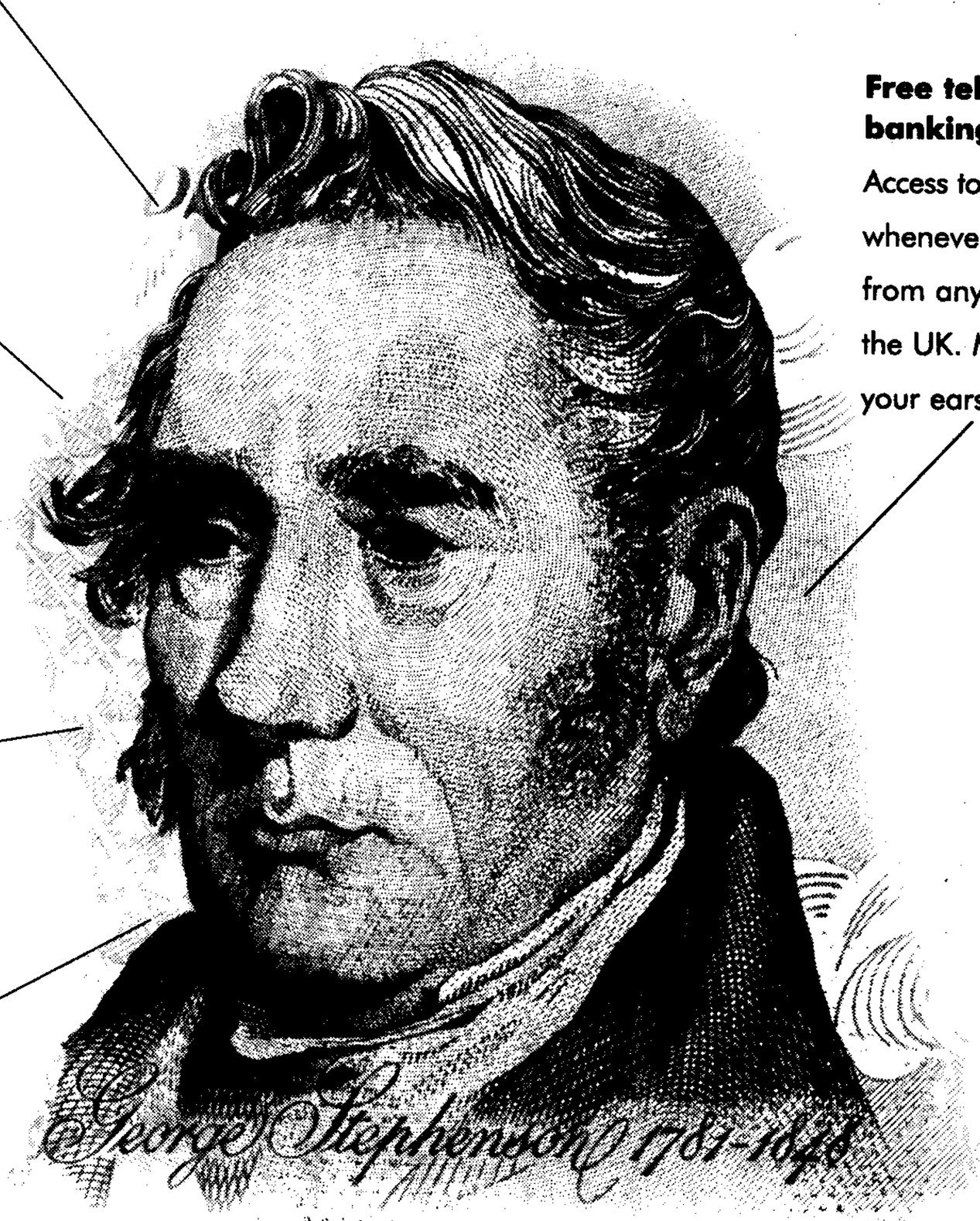

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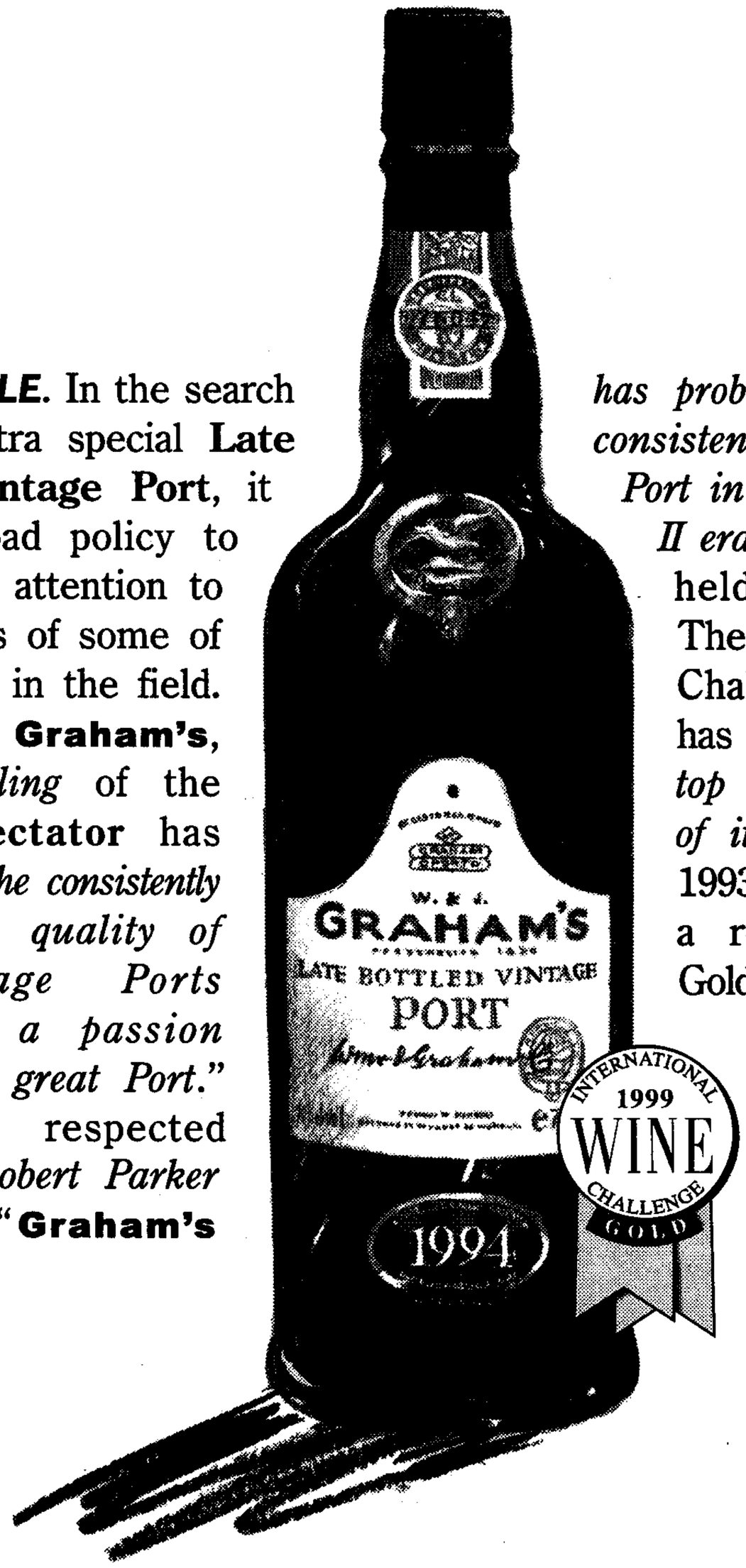

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NEWS

THE award by a north London tribunal of just under £150,000 to compensate for the injured feelings of former police sergeant Gurpal Singh Virdi is a fitting tribute to his long battle for justice.

The tribunal's long list of reasons for this record payment to compensate Mr Virdi's feelings for being victimised, entrapped in a secret interview and discriminated against on grounds of his race is a devastating indictment of the Metropolitan police.

Eye readers first read of the case two years ago, when *Eye* 968 (22 Jan, 99) reported the Met's hostile reaction to Sgt Virdi's criticism that his fellow officers had not classified an attack on an Iraqi student as racial. In March 1998, on his return from holiday, the Virdis' home was raided and searched by a crack police team. Though he had served 17 years in the police without a blemish on his record, he was arrested, suspended and accused of sending racist mail from his computer to himself and other officers.

Anyone reading this story in the newspapers (especially in the *Daily Mail*) would have concluded that he was guilty as hell. The police leaked his name and ethnic origin, and, in March last year, hauled him up in front of a disciplinary tribunal headed by three commanders. Last April the tribunal, after a four-week hearing, found Mr Virdi guilty "beyond all doubt" – a decision jubilantly reported in all the media except the *Eye,* which described the verdict as "preposterous" (*Eye* 1000).

This decision was reversed by the industrial tribunal that sat for even longer before concluding that Mr Virdi had not sent out the racist mail, and that the evidence against him had been completely false. Some months later, the Met deigned at last to apologise and the record compensation award flows from that apology.

The case is not over yet. Mr Virdi's claim for unfair dismissal comes up again next March and more damages can be confidently predicted.

The full story can be followed in the *Eye* over two years, issues: 968, 969, 971, 976, 979, 982, 983, 1000, 1010, 1011 and 1014.

Number crunchings

£150,000

■ sum paid out by Metropolitan police in compensation for racial discrimination against Asian police officer Gurpal Virdi.

£150,000

■ cost of putting six new Metropolitan police recruits on the beat.

SO, the investigation into claims that Mohamed Fayed obtained stolen documents belonging to Neil Hamilton's lawyers via the *Eye's* old friend, Benji "the Binman" Pell, has been dropped nine months after the *Mail on Sunday* reported the alleged offence.

Pell, who has enjoyed a long and prosperous career nicking rubbish from the bins of the rich, the famous and their hangers-on, can almost afford to breathe a sigh of relief. The Binman's last court appearance was at Blackfriar's crown court in November, where he was found guilty of using a certificate of insurance with intent to deceive by Judge Marr-Johnson and fined £850.

When Judge Marr-Johnson was deciding the terms upon which the fine should be paid, Pell's barrister asked him to take into consideration that his client is a cleaner earning around £10,000 a year. *Eye* readers will recall that on one Sunday alone in April 1999 the Binman earned £3,375 from the *Sunday Times* for stories based on his finds.

SIGNAL FAILURES

No staffing matter

DIRECTORS and senior managers of today's rail companies are paid more than their counterparts under British Rail. But where are they when the timetable falls to bits?

Senior BR managers saw it as their duty to be out and about at busy stations like Euston or King's Cross when trains were badly disrupted. They would see problems for themselves while boosting the confidence of hard-pressed station staff, setting an example and helping to inform passengers. In return they would often get earfuls of abuse.

Today's managers are so busy wrangling about compensation and posturing at meetings with ministers they don't have time to lead staff from the front. Moreover, Railtrack, which now (allegedly) controls the railway's day-to-day operations, doesn't even regard passengers as its own customers, so its managers and directors see no reason to leave their ivory towers at all.

When Railtrack managers decided to stop a reporter interviewing passengers at Glasgow Central, they sent one of their lowest-grade workers to do the dirty work. Next day the "grumpy-looking" employee's face was splashed over the *Daily Record* beside an article about his bosses' gagging order.

There has never been a worse time than the last two months to be an ordinary railway worker. Passengers are frustrated at the appalling mess when they travel and their anger is compounded when platform staff are not kept informed of changes by managers. Many staff lack the knowledge and experience to cope with wholesale disruption, having been brought in with minimal training to replace career rail workers who were on reasonable wages (*Eyes passim*).

Workers at the national rail inquiries helpline have been reduced to tears by irate callers. They sit in understaffed workhouses (aka "call centres") in regions where wages are low. They face a big screen that shows how many hundreds of angry people are in the phone queue. They, and booking clerks at stations, struggled in normal circumstances to get their minds around the Byzantine complexity of fares and timetable conditions. Over the past few weeks they have also had to grapple with a fluid timetable and unprecedented cancellations, as well as having to explain that fares have increased on some lines — the cheapest tickets having been suspended — while the quality of "service" has evaporated.

For staff on board the trains, including those running refreshment trolleys for little more than the minimum wage, the situation is even more dispiriting. Passengers expect drinks and food to be available as normal, though the supply system is messed up. They also expect to be kept informed about delays by a guard who may be as much in the dark as the passengers. At the end of their shifts, staff who work on trains may be hundreds of miles from home, normal rosters having been ditched.

Some middle managers may soon get bonuses of £100 or more for their hard work during the disruption, but as yet there is no sign of financial rewards for front-line staff.

GNER special

GNER, whose high-speed King's Cross to Leeds train was derailed at Hatfield, is anxious the accident should not undermine its bid to keep its franchise.

The franchise should have been awarded in the summer, but the shadow strategic rail authority (sSRA) had no strategy in place when it invited bids last year and it has had trouble evaluating contesting bids from GNER and Virgin. With a decision likely in the new year, James Sherwood, the "president" of the company that owns GNER, has tried some late spin-doctoring.

He said GNER was likely to win the new franchise because its performance during the four years before Hatfield had been "excellent" within the constraints of Railtrack's performance.

So what excellence did he mean exactly? Perhaps he was thinking of the GNER express which derailed in June 1998 because of a broken wheel and the disruption caused when most of GNER's fleet was grounded as a result. Or about the tilting trains GNER promised to have in service by 1999 but hasn't ordered yet. Or the 45 redundant sleeping carriages it promised to convert for daytime use.

Instead the company squeezed more out of the ex-BR fleet, blaming BR when the trains proved unable to withstand treatment for which they weren't designed (*Eye* 975). That had a big effect on punctuality; and so perhaps Sherwood was thinking of performance bulletins showing more than 10 percent of GNER trains arriving late (delays for which Railtrack was only partly to blame). The last bulletin before Hatfield showed that between 23 July and 14 October, one in four GNER trains arrived late on the most recently modernised main line in Britain. Even Virgin West Coast, whose route was in the throes of renewal, was fractionally more punctual.

NOT that GNER has lost its sense of humour. In recruitment ads for "on-board customer service assistants" (who will earn a princely £9,943 a year), GNER boasts that it is "a forward-thinking company, committed to delivering the Ultimate Travel Experience to all our customers".

As customer services manager Debbie Hurwitt says in the advertisements: "Essentially you have to be the sort of person who loves it when things go wrong." Too true. Too true.

Number crunchings

£400,000

■ golden handshake given to former Railtrack chief executive Gerald Corbett.

£400,000

■ cost of fifty Railtrack signallers for one year.

GNER was the rail company which apologised to first class passengers for a 7½ hour train journey from Newcastle to London but forgot to say sorry to the plebs in second class (see *Eye* 1015), and has again shown that even in the middle of a rail crisis money can buy better service.

Passengers attempting to travel from London to Durham or Newcastle on the night of Friday 1 December were obliged to catch the 9pm train from Kings Cross to Darlington. When they arrived at Darlington 4½ hours later, they had to wait a further half hour for a GNER bus.

When eventually it arrived, they hoped it would take them straight to their final destination; but before they could protest the driver had turned off the main road and started dropping off first class passengers at their homes. Second class passengers were eventually dumped at Durham and Newcastle stations in the early hours of Saturday morning.

'Dr B.Ching'

"It's the land of the fee!"

Street Of Shame

THE PORN AGAIN EXPRESS

ROSIE BOYCOTT has been quick to avenge herself on the man who sold her down the river, whom she now calls "the evil Lord Hollick". Last Thursday's *Daily Express* carried a two-page investigation into the "taxation scandal of Blair tycoons". Prominent among these scandalous tax-avoiding moguls was milord Hollick.

Will the Express follow up with a similar piece on Hollick's successor? Richard Desmond's main company paid just £75,000 tax last year on profits of £2.1m.

Probably not. Still, elsewhere in Thursday's paper, prominently positioned at the top of page 5, was the headline: "Is the boss a psychopath?" According to two academics, some psychopaths never commit a crime: they become "successful businessmen" instead. "They may lack a moral code, but this could be just the quality they need to succeed." Could the *Express* by any chance be thinking of its new proprietor, porn baron Richard Desmond?

He certainly has a violent temper. As one of his colleagues told an *Express* executive last week: "Richard only really loses it about three times a year." And what happens then? "He throws things. Last time it happened to me, he chucked a chair straight at me." Did you throw it back? "Nah, course not. You just have to take it."

Desmond's air of menace is accentuated by his permanent escort of bodyguards – and by some of the exceedingly dodgy characters with whom he has done business over the years. See the *Times* front page last week which was a retelling of Justine Picardie's 1993 investigation into Dirty Des under the headline "The Mafia, The Express and The Porn Lines".

Desmond was worried enough by this unsavoury affair to acquire a posse of burly security guards – including a young ginger-haired minder called James Brown. Brown clearly impressed his boss: by the end of 1993 he had become company secretary of no fewer than nine of Desmond's porn businesses, including the main holding company Portland Investments.

Can this by any chance be the same James Brown who on 2 December 1987 was sentenced by an Old Bailey judge to seven years in jail for "acts tending to pervert the course of public justice" and "possession of a firearm and ammunition with intent to endanger life"? Indeed so. He had earned his porridge by going into a Surrey pub and threatening a man who was a potential witness in another trial. "Are you going to give evidence against my friend, you Irish bastard?" Brown yelled, holding a loaded sawn-off shotgun against the man's head to emphasise his point.

Brown was hired by Desmond shortly after his release, and soon showed that he hadn't entirely lost his old intimidatory skills. In 1994 he became a director of Retail Revolution, a joint venture set up by Desmond with the credit-card entrepreneur David Elias to sell porn magazines through petrol stations. The idea was that Desmond would provide the mags and Elias would arrange the distribution, but it was a flop from the outset. Elias blamed Desmond, complaining that the "quality and content" of titles such as *Megaboobs* and *Suburban Housewife* was unsatisfactory. Desmond and Brown retaliated by launching a £97m breach-of-contract suit against Elias, eventually forcing him into bankruptcy.

After a particularly stormy meeting between the two warring parties in 1994, one of Elias's colleagues wrote to Desmond protesting about "the red-headed colleague [ie James Brown] who appeared after your departure, refusing to identify himself, but seeking to identify us in an offensive and intimidating manner." Desmond laughed it off, replying that Brown merely wanted to be sure that he delivered correspondence to the right people. "Please don't watch so many late-night movies," he added sardonically.

Brown himself incurred Desmond's wrath soon afterwards by defecting to a rival porn magazine, *Hustler*. He now runs a pub in Cornwall. Perhaps the department of trade and industry, which is supposed to be deciding this week if Desmond is "a fit and proper person" to own the *Express*, ought to pay him a visit.

AMONG the murky characters in Richard Desmond's current entourage few are murkier than Stan Myerson, the managing director of Northern & Shell, who has now taken charge of the advertising departments at the *Express*.

As we reported in the last *Eye*, Myerson was sacked from the *Express* six years ago for "gross misconduct". Further details of his glorious career are given in the recent memoirs of Andrew Cameron, who was managing director of Express Newspapers at the time.

As deputy advertising director for the *Daily Express*, Myerson "grassed up" his boss David Lammin for a minor financial fiddle. Lammin was duly fired, and Myerson assumed that he would now move into the top job. Instead, however, the *Express* headhunted Michael Moore from TV-am. So Myerson then set about destroying him too: he informed Cameron that Moore had pocketed £600,000 from unofficial "contra dealing" with *Express* advertisers. The story was quite untrue, as an internal investigation established.

Having failed to nail Moore for financial corruption, Myerson then tried another tack. He hired a firm of private detectives to spy on Moore and collect proof that he was having an affair with a female sales manager in the classified advertising department. "Now will you do something," Myerson demanded, as he gave Cameron the incriminating evidence. Cameron replied that he couldn't start sacking people for having a bit on the side. In high dudgeon, Myerson threatened to send the report to Moore's wife unless he resigned. "So Michael Moore fell on his sword," Cameron writes, "essentially as a result of being blackmailed by Stan Myerson."

But Myerson's triumph was shortlived. For he was himself guilty of the very "offence" which caused Moore's downfall – having an extra-marital affair with a manager in the classified department. More seriously, both he and his mistress, Rene Hoenderkamp, had been feathering their nests at the company's expense. If classified sales were below target, Myerson would use his position to transfer revenue from the above-target display ad sales figures. The result was a healthy bonus for Hoenderkamp and another one for Myerson, whose bonus was based on the overall department performance.

According to Cameron, Myerson was also fiddling his expenses on a grand scale, "even bullying staff into filling in fictitious receipts and embroiling them in the corruption by encouraging them to climb on to the bent expenses bandwagon… his rages were notorious and feared by all his staff without exception… He had repeatedly threatened violence to his staff, and actually carried out his threats on some occasions."

When Myerson learned he was under investigation, he warned several of his staff that their "physical well-being would be at risk" if they talked. As the net closed in, his rages became so terrifying that the two principal investigators "feared for their safety".

And this man is Desmond's most senior executive. As Cameron concludes: "Stan Myerson was probably the most distasteful and unpleasant man I met in all my newspaper years." Is it any wonder Desmond has such a high opinion of him?

LORD Hollick's parting gift of £40,000 apiece to 25 of his favourite *Express* hacks has been "horribly divisive", as editor Rosie Boycott admitted in a memo to disgruntled staff.

Some recipients, such as bibulous diarist John McEntee and assistant editor Chris Williams, were so embarrassed they at first denied getting anything. Others, such as the equally bibulous political hack Peter Oborne, could not wait to boast about their windfall to less fortunate colleagues.

But the reaction of City hack David Hellier, yet another £40,000 man, was one of profound puzzlement. The last time he met his old proprietor, Hellier received a full-scale Hollicking for something he had written. "I'd like to stab you in the eyes with this!" Hollick yelled, waving a fountain-pen. "I'd like to hear that your body has been found floating in the Thames!"

AS THE *Eye* revealed last year, *Express* editor Rosie Boycott would like a peerage. But it seems she may have to wait a bit longer: with an election likely next May, Tony Blair is keen for her to keep the paper on-side until Labour has been safely reelected. Then she can head off to the House of Lords.

The PM himself spoke to Rosie two weeks ago, encouraging her to put up with new owner Richard Desmond for at least another six months. True, Blair admitted, Desmond might seem pretty ghastly – "but he's no worse than David Montgomery or Robert Maxwell". Most reassuring!

ONE sad casualty of the new regime at the *Daily Express* is editor Rosie Boycott's weekly letter to her readers, which normally appears every Saturday. Since Desmond took over, it has been dropped – apparently because Rosie can't think of any suitably uplifting message about the goings-on at the Grey Lubyanka.

Not that Rosie herself always wrote the little homilies which appeared under her name. The wife of deputy editor Chris Blackhurst once found her husband hunched over his home computer, writing a piece which began: "As the mother of a teenage daughter, I…" When she reminded Blackhurst that he was in fact a father, he was forced to confess sadly that his many duties included acting as Rosie's ghost-writer.

EVERYONE in Fleet Street knows that *Express* columnist John Diamond can't speak properly since his cancer operations, and communicates at parties by writing messages on a pad.

Everyone, apparently, except Richard Desmond, who met Diamond at the paper's Christmas party last week. After a few minutes discussing their East End Jewish backgrounds, with Desmond chatting happily and Diamond scribbling on a pad, the new *Express* boss turned to an aide and shouted irritably: "What's *wrong* with this man?"

AT THE office Christmas party various *Express* hacks disgraced themselves with displays of brown-nosing the boss, but one failed to play ball. Desmond told an *Express* hack that if the paper didn't overtake the *Daily Mail* within four years "I'm going to be fucking disappointed."

"Oh well," a very senior executive said on hearing of the remark, "he's going to be *fucking* disappointed then, isn't he?"

WHILE most *Express* hacks are falling into terminal depression, their new proprietor has never been happier.

At the end of the recent visit to the office by Posh and Becks, Desmond took his celebrity chums up to the boardroom and showed them the magnificent view of the Thames. "So here we all are," he said, lighting a fat cigar. "David, you're the fucking captain of the English football team. Victoria, you're the biggest fucking pop star in England. And I'm the fucking owner of the *Daily Express*."

Overcome with emotion, he paused to savour the moment. "Isn't it all just *fucking brilliant!*"

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house
Not a creature was stirring except for the mouse...

HACKWATCH

A Rosy Future

ASTROLOGER Jonathan Cainer, who was lured to the *Express* for a huge fee by horoscope-loving Rosie Boycott, has now been offered an even more colossal sum by Piers Morgan to defect to the *Mirror*. But he remains loyal to Rosie, and is desperate for her to stay on under the Desmond regime rather than resigning in protest.

Boycott's star-sign is Taurus – and, by a strange coincidence, Cainer has been offering the following advice in the "Taurus" section of his column:

1 December: "Somebody [*Cainer, perhaps?*] needs you to help them with a tricky predicament. You, though, have pressing concerns of your own... It is tempting to stand back. Nobody will blame you if you do – indeed, you are more likely to be criticised if you get involved."

4 December: "Options and possibilities are limited at the moment. Circumstances are dictating a policy of restraint... Stop feeling cross about what can't happen [*a takeover by the Hinduja brothers?*] and look again at what is feasible."

5 December: "There are times when you wonder if you ought to be more assertive. You watch other people behaving belligerently... You are quite capable of making an emphatic gesture when you need to and you are wondering if this is a good time for it. It may be. If, though, you are going to speak out, think carefully first about what you need to say... and do."

6 December: "Should you give things time to settle? Or should you make a decision right now on the grounds that you can sense which way the wind is blowing?... You need to think about the amount of control that you have over a certain situation."

7 December: "You are not clear about what you ought to be doing or where you ought to be going... You are also conscious of the way your ideas conflict with those around you."

8 December: "You have been thinking about the same subject for too long... It is as if you are stuck in a hot, stuffy room. Over the window there's a sign saying: 'Not to be opened without official permission.' You keep wondering if you should ignore this – or go to seek a suitable 'official', but then the heat gets to you – apathy sets in and you stare once more into space. Get up and do something."

11 December: "All you have to do is deal with the factors that are making you feel so awkward, insecure and unhappy. That's exactly what you are doing now. Stay on the same track and don't waiver. Real results and rewards are due soon."

REST OF THE PRESS

THE *Daily Mail* was deeply moved by the death of Damilola Taylor. In a huge front-page headline, it eulogised him as "THE BOY WHO CAME HERE FOR A BETTER WAY OF LIFE".

Can this by any chance be the same *Daily Mail* which only last month wrote of the need for tough action from Jack Straw "to quell fears that Britain is a 'soft touch' for economic migrants seeking a better life here"?

THE *Guardian*'s campaign for the abolition of the monarchy caused the Queen's private office much anguish.

Having received from the press office copies of the daily papers with royal references highlighted, they were busy cutting out the usual selection to be presented to Brenda in her morning briefing file. This is usually laid on her desk next to the wicker basket containing correspondence.

Having realised they couldn't keep the *Guardian*'s treachery from the Queen, and realising that all six pages would have to be presented to the royal gaze, there was a sudden hush. An advance corgi entered the room closely followed by Brenda, up and about earlier than usual. She had arrived to read the paper for herself, having been tipped-off by her dresser, who'd heard about it on the radio.

With her nose wrinkled she went straight to the desk in the middle of the room and leafed through the offensive pages. The painful task completed she looked up at her staff as if accusing all of them of having written it. With a curt "carry on" she left the room.

One paper was unavailable to visitors in the palace waiting room that day. No prizes for guessing which.

OH, YEAH? The Guardian's clarion call yesterday for a full-blooded national conversation on the crown has proved that the opposite can be true. On dozens of radio stations, websites and TV networks in Britain and throughout the world our demand for a change was debated from early morning till late at night. Traffic on the message boards and chat rooms of the internet was heavier than usual, as Britons lined up to discuss the place of their head of state. For all their supposed indifference to the topic, they were anxious to make their voice heard.

– *The Guardian, 7 December 2000*

HUGE embarrassment at the muck-rakin', sleaze-bustin' *Grauniad*: one of its own contributors has been accused of sleazy behaviour. The man is wine critic Malcolm Gluck, who also writes the annual *Superplonk* books (which earn him well over £100,000 a year) and markets his own "Superplonk" wines through Tesco.

The alarm bells in Farringdon Road began to ring on 18 November, when the *Times*'s wine-writer Jane MacQuitty wrote a feature attacking the extra-curricular interests of her colleagues. "It is no secret that many wine writers have financial arrangements with wine concerns that must surely colour their judgement," she claimed. "Wine writers like Malcolm Gluck, for example, see no conflict of interest with his [*Guardian*] newspaper column in choosing wines for Tesco which are then emblazoned with the name of his latest book."

When the *Sunday Times* followed up the story a week later, Gluck was cheerfully unrepentant. "Of course there is a conflict of interest," he boasted. "I like conflicts of interest." Alan Rusbridger was less amused and immediately asked the paper's ombudsman Ian Mayes to investigate Gluck's activities.

Mayes's report, published last Saturday, finds no evidence that Gluck has unduly favoured Tesco. (Anyone reading Gluck's OBN comments about Tesco in *Superplonk 2001* may disagree: "No retailer thinks faster on its feet and none is more concerned to keep prices as low as humanly possible, in some cases inhumanly low, say its green-eyed competitors.") But Mayes is dismayed to learn that Gluck gets well over £10,000 a year in "royalties" on the Tesco wines – an arrangement "which has never been publicly declared".

Clearly shocked by the discovery, the *Grauniad* has decided the royalties will in future go to charity. To soften the blow, however, next year the paper will pay Gluck whatever he would otherwise have earned from the Tesco wines.

If *Guardian* executives were really unaware of Gluck's "royalties" perhaps they should pay closer attention to the *Eye*, where the arrangement was revealed immediately after he launched his Superlonk wines. As we noted in *Eye* 876 (14 July 1995): "The *Grauniad* – which is so severe on MPs who have 'outside interests' – may care to explain how Gluck can still be regarded as an impartial commentator on supermarket wines when he has entered into a commercial arrangement with one of the principal objects of his scrutiny."

A mere five-and-a-half years later the *Grauniad* has acknowledged that, er, he can't.

COMPETITION is positively fierce as News International commentators Sion Simon (*News of the World*) and Mary Ann Sieghart (the *Times*) tussle for the coveted title of Most Stomach-Churningly Sycophantic Fan of New Labour.

Simon has recently surpassed himself for egregious brown nosing, shamelessly using his toadying column to boost the careers of an assortment of party unknowns to bewildered *Screws* readers: pointy heads like David Miliband and Matthew Taylor who – hold the front page – will soon be changing jobs. Most recently he sucked up to "genial Labour backbencher" Fraser Kemp – "the only British politician to be invited to President Clinton's exclusive leaving do in Washington" as Simon panted in his ludicrous "Hidden Agendas" strip. "He's also rather unusual in being asked to appear on *Ready, Steady, Cook*... For goodness sake, Tony, give the man a job before you lose him to showbiz."

Still, Simon has a fight on his hands as serial "new" Labour groupie Sieghart has recently surpassed her own record for name dropping in a gruesome eulogy to ministers for publishing a green paper on "family friendly working".

As she wrote on 8 December: "Three cheers for Labour women... I can't count the number of hours I have spent in the past 15 years lamenting [lack of progress] with the likes of Harriet Harman, Margaret Hodge, Patricia Hewitt and Tessa Jowell. As well as these four women, some of the new backbenchers deserve credit."

There followed a name check for some of Sieghart's many friends. "Ruth Kelly, who has given birth to three children in her three years in parliament, has crunched the numbers, pioneered the policy and briefed Stephen Byers... Lorna Fitzsimmons, Julie Morgan and Anne Campbell have also been active... So never let it be said that Labour women MPs (I refuse to use the 'BB' phrase) have made no difference."

MORE red faces in Manchester following the *Eye*'s revelation of the huge shortfall in sponsorship for the 2002 Commonwealth games (*Eye* 1014).

Three weeks after our story appeared the *Grauniad* stirred itself and reported that the games were indeed facing a £20m gap in sponsorship. This enraged Manchester city council chief executive Howard Bernstein, who fumed: "This is another example of the London media trying to sneer at and criticise a prestige event in the north."

Amusingly, one of the few commercial sponsors which *has* pledged to sponsor the games is, er, the Guardian Media Group, whose *Manchester Evening News* takes a blandly uncritical line on the games. It certainly has good contacts. Manchester city council press officer Janine Watson, formerly the *MEN*'s former municipal reporter, described the *Grauniad* piece as "nasty". The *MEN* itself, anxious to avoid offending either its parent company or its pals on the city council, timidly reported the row as having been about an article in an unnamed "London newspaper".

O·B·N

My wife and I, my family, my many friends and I suspect the majority of the citizens of Scotland will wholeheartedly support your campaign to democratise the royal family. Thank you, Mr Rusbridger.

FRANCIS WHEELER
Guardian

Nominated by Strobes.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

IN THE TEAROOM

POOR beleaguered William Hague may soon have to sort out a problem involving the second most important woman in his life. The knives are out for Amanda Platell, the former Fleet Street hackette who is now his chief spin doctor.

Even one of Hague's loyalists, shadow health secretary Dr Liam Fox, pointedly told Sky News last week that the Tory leader "performs much better when he's being himself rather than what the image-makers are trying to make him". Though the fun-loving Platell is personally popular, many senior Tories fear she will be "crucified" by Alastair Campbell during the general election campaign. As one patrician grumbled over a drink in Annie's Bar: "The idea of Amanda masterminding our election spin strategy against Campbell would be like sending the Brownies to fight the SAS."

Critics blame Amanda for the farcical "14 pints" interview in *GQ*, for the heavy media hyping of Ann Widdecombe's "zero tolerance" speech at party conference and the subsequent humiliating climbdowns and clarifications. Some have not yet forgotten Platell's brainwave of publicising the romantic pendant in the shape of a pound-sign which Hague had allegedly bought Ffion Hague, a stunt which fell apart when the jeweller admitted that it was Platell and not Hague who had ordered the thing – and had then forgotten to pay for it.

The problem, however, is that Platell has become a close friend of Ffion, who played a major part in her original appointment. Party grandees are now wondering how to persuade their leader to wield the axe and ignore objections from 'er indoors.

THE backlash against National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice) approval of the anti-flu drug Relenza (see last *Eye*) is growing.

The *Health Service Journal* reports that two former members of the department of health's joint committee on vaccinations are worried that an anti-viral drug that costs 10 times less than Relenza is overlooked in the Nice judgement.

Professor John Oxford and Dr John Watkins point out that amantadine (sold as Lysovir), available in the UK for nearly 30 years, is as good as Relenza but costs £2.40 for a course compared to £24 for Relenza. Nice advice tells doctors when they can turn to Relenza but makes no mention of Lysovir.

There are two crucial differences between Lysovir and Relenza. Lysovir is distributed by Alliance Pharmaceuticals, whose executives haven't sat on important government committees and haven't hired expensive lobbyists. Relenza is made by Glaxo, whose chairman Sir Richard Sykes sits on health secretary Alan Milburn's NHS committee.

Moreover Glaxo has hired lobbying firm GPC (see *Eyes passim*). Derek Draper's old firm fared badly after the Lobbygate scandal but has picked itself up again: Under the leadership of former David Mellor aide Peter Bingle, the Millbank-based firm has hired more Labour-linked staff, principally Joy Johnson, Labour's former communications head, and Anna Healy Prior, who not only worked as a special adviser to Jack Cunningham and Mo Mowlam, but also served as a press officer to Tony Blair.

THE building firm Christiani & Nielsen finally went bust on 17 November leaving everyone – even the government – in the lurch.

Private finance initiative (PFI) schemes that Christiani was meant to run – like taking over schools and colleges under the pseudonym "education links" in Newbury, Berkshire – have gone down the drain.

Only one man comes out smiling. He is Alan Crane, former £180,000 a year chairman and a former Labour councillor, who has a new job. He is now chairman of the government's "Movement for Innovation", a quango set up to create "self sustaining continuous improvement, leading to world class performance and increased profitability" by promoting best practice in the building industry.

ALTHOUGH home secretary Jack Straw's driver escaped conviction for speeding after being stopped on the motorway with his boss sitting behind him, there is no question Straw was in a hurry to get to Exeter on that hot day in July.

His advisers had got wind of a rebellion at Labour's usually tame National Policy Forum – and, mused Straw, it needed personal attention. Hostile policy resolutions attacking his controversial voucher scheme for asylum seekers (submitted by Bill Morris and the T&G union) were to be debated, and with union support they were very likely to sail through the forum and subsequently cause a great ruckus at the party's autumn conference.

In fact Straw arrived late in Exeter, but not too late to promise that the policy would be "reviewed". This promise was renewed again in the autumn when the comrades gathered in Brighton. Since the TUC had already responded to the "review" by voting to scrap the scheme altogether, it might have occurred to Straw that he was unlikely to get the "right" answers to his review. Which is presumably why there was no mention of this petty fogging scheme, which has been universally savaged by human rights and refugee groups, in last week's Queen's speech.

AS PART of Labour's "thank you" campaign for those who voted for him at the last election, Tony Blair has been touring key marginals also saying "thank you" to audiences hand-picked by local Labour parties.

Thus it was last month that he found himself talking to nurses, teachers and GPs in St Albans. One member of the audience was so taken by what she heard that she immediately wrote a letter to local members. "I was proud to be asked to chair the meeting and proud that the local party and my constituency office were able to work together to make the events such a success," gushed Kerry Pollard a JP and... MP for St Albans.

"The fact that St Albans was chosen to launch this campaign is something we can all take pride in... The prime minister and his team were overwhelmed with the warmth of the welcome given to him by the audience, not all of whom were Labour voters... I was also impressed with the behaviour of those party members who attended".

As well she might: off-message party members weren't invited.

HOME secretary Jack Straw's parliamentary private secretary Colin Pickthall is not the only one in a sweat as he waits for the crown prosecution service (CPS) to decide if he is to be charged in connection with allegations of "financial irregularities" at his West Lancashire constituency Labour party.

Following a year-long investigation launched after a story in *Eye* 987, police last week submitted a file of evidence to the CPS, naming Thickpall, his secretary Pauline Roughley and two senior Lancashire county councillors, Frank McKenna and John Fillis. McKenna was Thickpall's agent at the 1997 general election.

The *Eye* revealed how an audit had discovered that the MP's return of election expenses had been "deliberately falsified" and listed a catalogue of serious irregularities in the constituency party's financial affairs. Senior regional and national Labour party officers will have some explaining to do should successful prosecutions ensue.

Within a fortnight of the *Eye* story Labour's north-west region claimed to have "investigated" the affair and established that nothing was amiss. Meanwhile the auditor who had uncovered the irregularities, Francis Williams, was rewarded for his diligence by being sent to Coventry and removed from the list of potential council candidates.

A COLLAPSING share price is not the only problem to beset Sema, the French-owned company that bids for so many UK government and council contracts (see last *Eye*).

One of its directors, Hartmut Lademacher, has had to resign because of an insider-dealing scandal; and SEMA's chief executive is now under pressure to step down too.

Nevertheless, Tony Blair's government has decided to shortlist the firm for yet another health-related contract, despite its disastrous stewardship of Benefits Agency Medical Services. On 1 December parliamentary under-secretary Lord Hunt announced that Sema was being considered to oversee the "Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions" between GPs and community pharmacies.

"UNWARRANTABLE arrogance" were the surprisingly strong words the House of Commons public accounts committee (PAC) used to savage the ministry of defence over the Chinook helicopter crash on the Mull of Kintyre.

The committee used the words to describe the MoD's preference for its own board of inquiry (which said the pilots were wholly to blame beyond all doubt) over the precisely opposite conclusions of a properly constituted fatal accident inquiry.

The words may have seemed very apposite to viewers of the *Newsnight* programme on the Chinook affair. It featured none other than Sir William Wratten, head of the air force at the time and chairman of the board of inquiry into the Mull of Kintyre crash. Sir William's performance distilled the very essence of "unwarrantable arrogance".

One man clearly impressed by the conclusions of the public accounts committee was the prime minister who, during Commons question time, appeared to sympathise with the pilots' supporters. Blair's mood changed very fast, however, when he was confronted by his minister of defence Geoff Hoon and his rottweiler of a junior minister, John Spellar. Spellar and Hoon quickly convinced the prime minister that any disavowal of the board of inquiry would cause incalculable damage to morale and discipline in the armed services. Blair complied at once.

FACT TO REMEMBER: Sir William Wratten is no longer in the RAF. When he left last year he leaped through the revolving door between the armed services and private industry and joined Rolls Royce.

HIS LORDSHIP said that in February 2000, the Official Receiver had issued proceedings, at the request of the Secretary of State for Trade and Injury against Mr Hay

The Times

"NEW" Labour whips used a novel device to put the frighteners on backbenchers who were threatening to revolt in the debate on home secretary Jack Straw's prohibitive charges for foreigners wishing to appeal if they are refused a visa.

The whips told the MPs that if they voted down regulations setting an unprecedented £500 fee for an oral appeal and a £150 fee for a written appeal, they would be putting would-be visitors at risk of paying even higher fees.

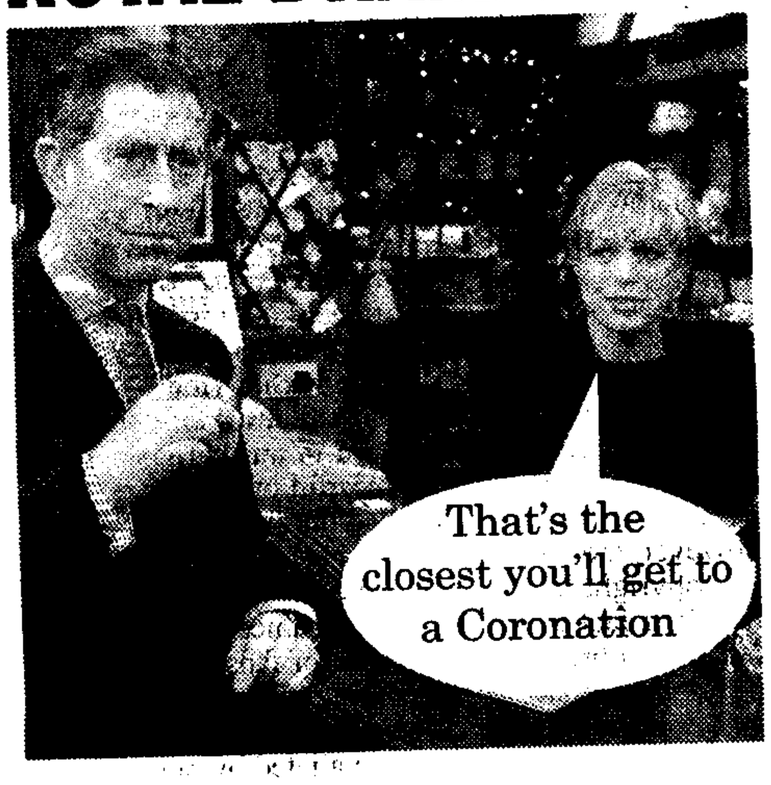
The reason, it seems, is that two sets of fees were set out in statutory instruments laid before parliament in September: the first by Straw himself, setting fees of £580 and £280; the second by his immigration minister Barbara Roche containing the lower fees.

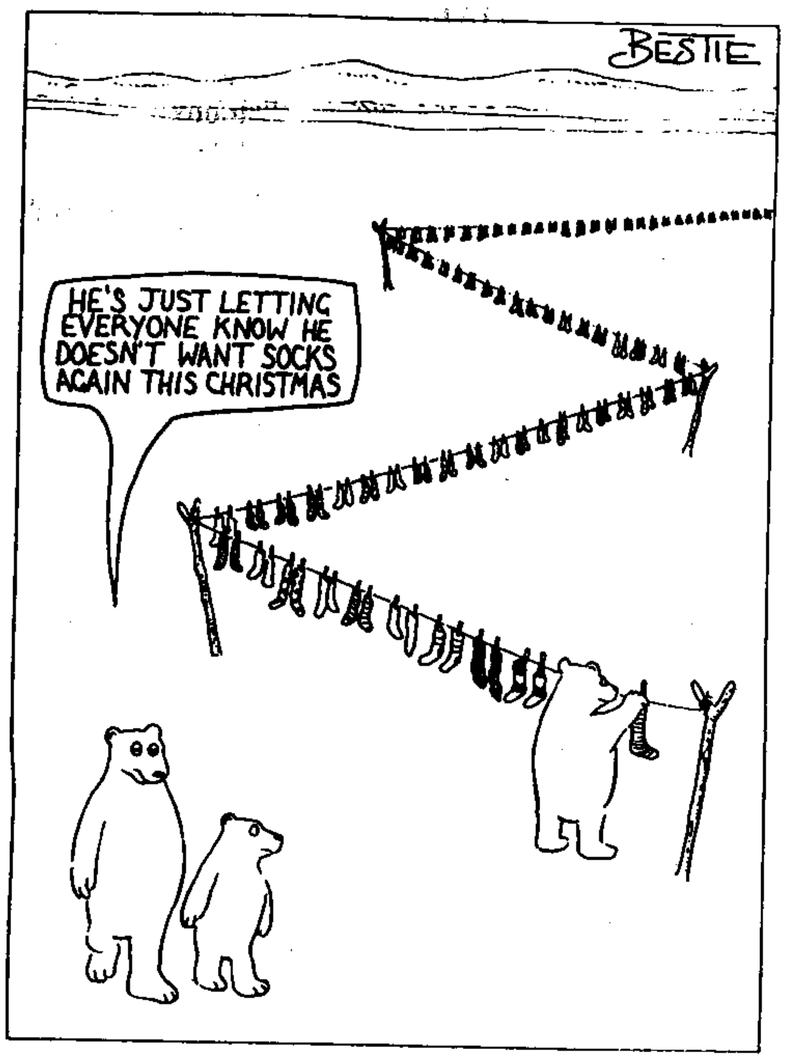
Barry Gardiner, Labour MP for Brent North, asked the home secretary if the decision to place both before parliament was "a cock-up or a conspiracy". It was, said Straw, a cock-up. But it was a handy stick to keep the would-be rebels in line, with only 17 brave enough to vote with the Lib Dems to get rid of the charges.

It is perhaps not surprising that there have been only 33 appeals since the new rights came in. According to the government's own figures, there should have been about 1,800.

'Backbiter'

ROYAL DRAMA





WORLD OF SPORT

DESPITE all his protests to the contrary, Ken Bates's control over the doomed new English National Stadium at Wembley has become as tenuous as his command of the basics of business finance.

The controversial chairman of Wembley National Stadium Ltd, the Football Association subsidiary which is overseeing the stadium development, came in for a real battering at an emergency council meeting held at FA headquarters in Soho Square last Friday. And Bates had to endure a two-hour pasting from FA chief executive Adam Crozier beforehand. Despite emerging from the meeting to claim he had unanimous support to continue as chairman of WNSL, he will do so now only in name.

Bates suffered the ultimate indignity of seeing his grandiose £660m plan for a stadium with offices and a hotel scrapped at the meeting. At least £100m will be sliced off the costs and the FA will have to find £100m towards the final development price.

Even worse news for Bates is that Crozier and other FA officials will take a much closer role in supervising WNSL. This could mean a reexamination of the £326m development deal with developers Multiplex – revealed in the last *Eye* – and of Bates's working relationship with the Australian developers, who are already working on a new stand at Bates's Chelsea ground.

The Wembley project will be years behind schedule, if it is ever completed, and questions will undoubtedly be asked in the Commons as to whether Bates was ever the right man for such an important job. To judge by his Chelsea programme notes last Saturday, he certainly seems to have an erratic grasp of arithmetic. Bates denies that Chelsea is in financial trouble, claiming that his club has £43m in the bank. Yet the club's own annual report also reveals total liabilities of close to £140m – the second largest debt of any football club in Europe behind Real Madrid, putting Chelsea in a Champions' League all of its own.

DESPITE raking in squillions from TV deals, it seems the FA Premier League is still greedy for more. On 27 November it sent menacing letters to several "unofficial" football websites, mostly run by fans as a hobby, demanding anything from £300 to £4,000 for the right to display a list of fixtures – "failing which we have instructed our solicitors to commence proceedings forthwith and without further notice. Please note that we may also contact your web server with a view to placing a block on your website until all your infringements are eliminated to our satisfaction".

Some on-line fanzines, fearful of huge legal bills, have capitulated and removed the fixtures. Others, however, are taking a more robust attitude. There is no copyright in facts; and, since a football fixture is merely a fact consisting of two names and date, how can it be a breach of copyright for fans to mention some of their side's forthcoming games?

One unofficial Arsenal website, the charmingly named "Up The Arse", has retaliated by publishing a list of every possible combination and permutation of fixtures for *next* year – and writing to the pathetic box wallahs at the FA Premier League threatening them with legal action if they reproduce any part of it in next season's list.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THIS month Sir John Eliot Gardiner winds up his year of travelling round the world performing nothing but Bach Cantatas with a final batch of three in New York. As the whole venture has been an *annus horribilis* for the bad-tempered conductor, he'll presumably be glad to see the back of it.

The so-called "Pilgrimage" has left him £500,000 in the red after sponsors failed to write big enough cheques, the lottery fund turned him down and the Arts Council declined requests for help. Administrative problems (and attendant rows) prompted the general manager of his choir and orchestra to walk out less than 12 months after the previous general manager had done likewise. No replacement has been found.

His record company Deutsche Grammophon has not issued the entire cantata series on disc as it originally agreed to do and, if all this weren't enough, Deutsche Grammophon has delivered one last blow and sacked him. After 20 years of recording Gardiner's projects, DG has said his contract will not be renewed when it expires on 31 December. For someone so notoriously combative, Gardiner's response has been low key. He says he's "baffled". In fact he's probably too worn out to be anything else.

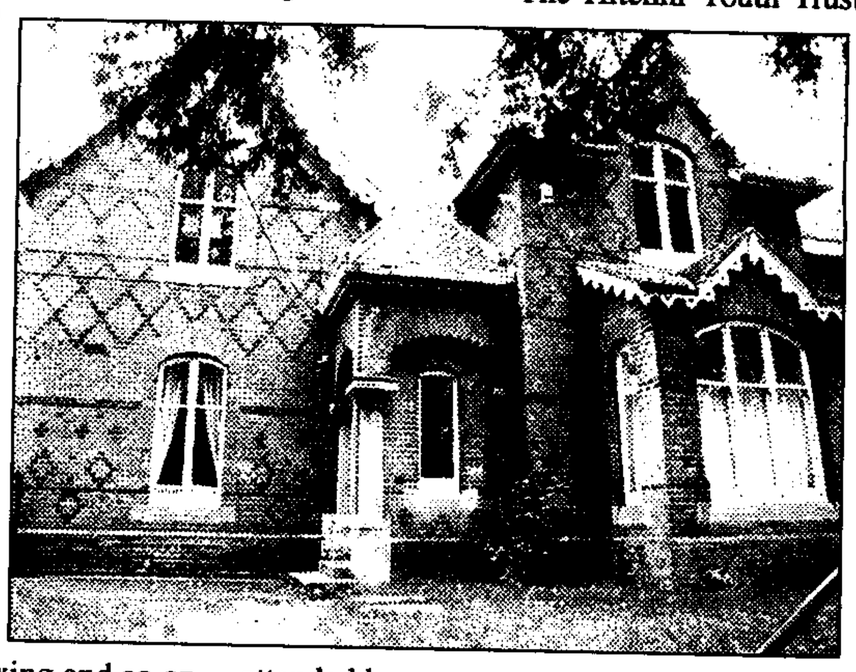
Apparently he plans to do no conducting during the first three months of 2001 and will spend the time pondering ideas for a book about Bach. It seems he isn't blaming Johann Sebastian for his year of troubles.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE Caldicott Centre in Highbury Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, is a decent, spiky Victorian Gothic house with fretted bargeboards and diaper-patterned brickwork. It began life as Hillside, the home of Charles Bartlett, and was built in 1857 to the design of the local architect Charles Gray Searle.

In 1904 the house became a school and a gymnasium and chapel were added. During the Second World War the school was requisitioned and in 1944 it was bought by Colonel J.C. Harrison, who gave it to the Hitchin Youth Centre Association. "Generations to come will have cause to think with gratitude of the public spirit which has prompted the generous donor to provide such an ideal centre for youth activities," said a local newspaper.



So far so good. But now this jolly and useful building is threatened with demolition by its owner, the Hitchin Youth Trust, despite the fact that it is used daily for various youth activities — dancing, boxing and so on —attended by hundreds of young people, just as the good colonel intended.

The Hitchin Amateur Boxing Club, which has used the building for more than half a century, has been given notice to quit by next September. Why? Because the Hitchin Youth Trust cannot be bothered to maintain the buildings and wants to demolish them: not to make way for a new sports centre but for a commercial redevelopment with a nice modern block of flats. By so doing one ostensible charity will be putting other charities out of business.

The behaviour of the trust seems indefensible and contrary to both the letter and spirit of Col Harrison's bequest. All that those who run the trust can come up with in self-defence are the tired old clichés typical of ancient old farts: for Tony Freeman, Hon Sec, the Caldicott Youth Centre is "a large rambling Victorian building which is not suited to use by young people in the 21st century"; for Norman Hyde, the president and, gosh, a "retired architect", it is "a hideous example of a pretentious nouveau riche, badly designed building." Mr Hyde, incidentally, has threatened to report the local paper, *The Comet*, to the press complaints commission for encouraging the campaign to keep the building, for most Hitchin residents seem to disagree with him and find it interesting, even beautiful, as well as very useful.

Not that Charles Gray Searle's only domestic masterpiece looks the way it should. In 1994 a report concluded that the school buildings were structurally sound but that "the brickwork face, jointing and general appearance has been allowed to deteriorate through absence of maintenance". When the trust then reroofed the Edwardian gymnasium, it could not be bothered to repair or replace the cupola, while the tall brick chimneys on the house have also disappeared — acts of casual vandalism which would seem to be the product of indifference and stupidity rather than malice, although it insists that "by its articles of association the trust cannot spend money on historic buildings however laudable that may seem". Yet the trust has almost £2m in the bank. And some 15 years ago it demolished a purpose-built youth centre on the adjacent site (subsequently sold) simply because it was badly managed.

The Hitchin Youth Trust is strangely reluctant to defend its policies publicly or to consult with the building's users, preferring to shelter behind a veil of secrecy. Although invited, no representative would appear at a recent public meeting about the future of the Caldicott Centre. As with universities and the churches and other bodies convinced of the transcendent moral superiority of their own immediate concerns, this so-called charitable trust is behaving with an arrogance which would not be tolerated in a private individual. It all seems typical of that all too common phenomenon of a charity that in its enthusiasm to increase its financial assets has lost all sense of its proper purpose.

AND another thing. A similar tale of secrecy and arrogance emerges in Lincoln, where a very good pub, the Adam and Eve, is threatened if not with demolition at least with closure.

The Adam & Eve is close to the cathedral, is at least 300 years old and is good of its sort and popular. At present it is run by Scottish & Newcastle Breweries, which has done a deal to sell it to the adjacent Lincoln Minster School for expansion. Even the manager of the pub was unaware of this until a letter was sent by Ewan Harper, chief executive of The Church Schools Company, to all parents of children at the school. "As part of the development plans," explained Mr Harper, "we have agreed in principle to acquire the Adam & Eve Public House and the significant parking area and garden attached to it... Quite how we will adapt the Adam & Eve itself remains to be seen, but no doubt both staff and sixth form will make a pitch for it, until they realise that we will be seeking to surrender the licence." [Joke.]

As it is a listed building the pub cannot simply be demolished; but to close an historic building admirably serving the purpose for which it was designed scarcely adds to the quality of life. We must be thankful, however, that the building is not in the hands of the likes of Mr Norman Hyde and the Hitchin Youth Trust...

'Piloti'

WEST SUFFOLK CUNTSERVATIVE ASSOCIATION
Organising Secretary
Full time (evening meetings)
Advertisement, Newmarket Journal

FIVE TV

Frost Night (BBC2)

FOLLOWING complaints in the last issue about television's self-pleasuring trend of commissioning "documentaries" about hit programmes, an even more horrible strain of the virus has emerged. Last Saturday the whole of BBC2's peak-time schedule was devoted to celebrating a single presenter. This is more normally described as incest.

And the host chosen for this attention was not even a BBC veteran such as Charles Wheeler, David Dimbleby or John Cole, any of whom might have deserved it; but a frontman who attracts a million or fewer viewers once a week on BBC1 and has almost never appeared on BBC2, the channel which gave him this accolade.

Frost Night, marking 40 years since his debut on *TW3*, was presumably justified under the two famous i-words which form the minority channel get-out: iconic and ironic. Although essentially a commercial television producer whose friendship with John Birt won him a Sunday morning slot on BBC1, Frost was honoured by the BBC for being in some wider sense a television icon.

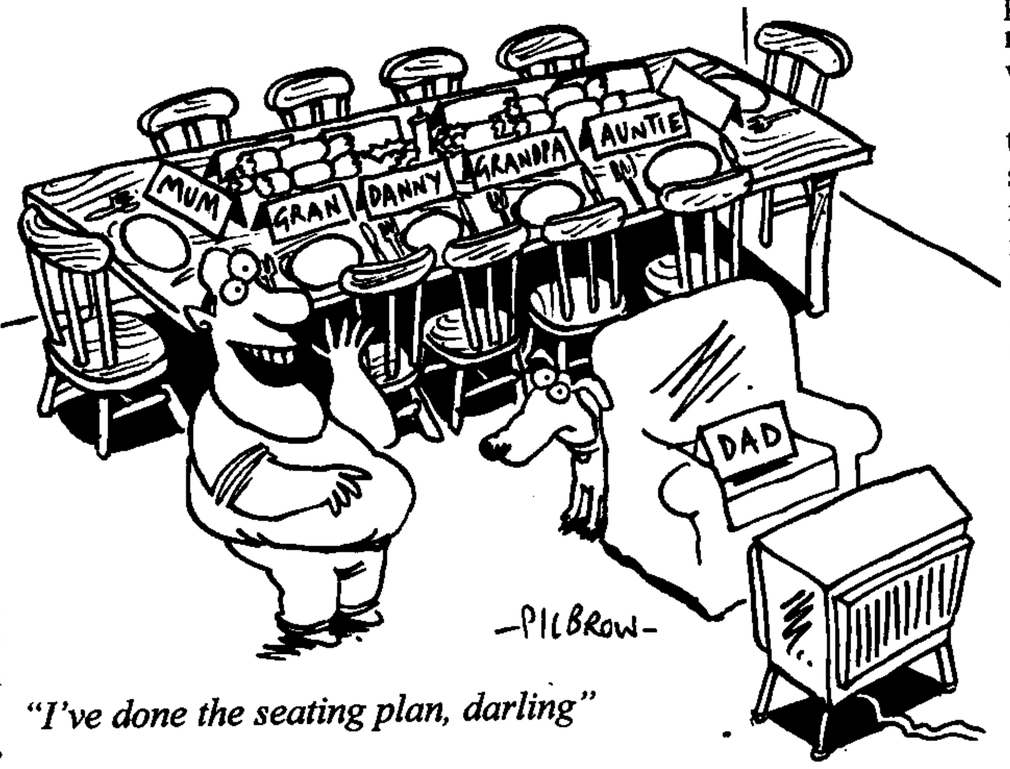
Even by the standards of themed evenings — which traditionally consist of old rope lashed round a scraped barrel — the contents of *Frost Night* were shocking. There was, for example, no repeated edition of *That Was The Week That Was*, presumably because of fears that satire dates. Almost 50 percent of the air-time was filled with yet another showing of *The Ipcress File*, the inclusion ludicrously explained by the fact that it is apparently one of Sir David's favourite films.

But you felt more kindly towards this desperate retreading when you saw the specially-made programmes. *Ross Meets Frost* was typical of the project's miscalculations. The surname-only title ridiculously suggested an equality of fame between Jonno and Sir David. It's just possible that the casting was someone being cruel, as Ross's career rather resembles Frost's in failing to match its dramatic beginnings, but Ross was almost certainly selected because of his form as a pop culture ironist.

The first problem was that, as Ross hasn't had a TV chatshow for around a decade, the programme had the feel of a special edition of a series which doesn't exist. Although less slurry than in his recent appearances on *Frost On Sunday*, which have prompted calls to the BBC switchboard inquiring about his health, Frost's performance largely consisted of rambling attempts to remember anecdotes which had worked in previous circumstances. Occasionally, Ross would try to gently lob a brick but Frost would catch it and sculpture a bouquet. Faced with the often-told story that Peter Cook's one regret had been saving Frost from drowning, Frost confided that he had it on good authority that Cook had been greatly proud of saving another human being's life.

There were frequent ugly jump-cuts from one of his answers to another question from Ross, which is usually a sign of an editor struggling to trim down a messy interview. And Ross's model as an interviewer seemed to be the unctuousness of Frost's own late style with politicians and the Prince of Wales. Pressed on whether he still had the anger which had led him to upbraid the insurance fraudster Savundra on TV, Frosty insisted that he still got worked up about the kind of people who "bilk the public". A list would have been interesting but Ross chose not to ask for it.

After the screening of the spy movie Sir David quite liked, there was an even more uncalled for programme. *Debate Of A Lifetime* found Frost in a rearranged version of the studio in which he had just talked to Ross. The host was positioned between audience sections identified by him as "under 35s" and the "over 55s". One of these may have been a slurry slip as it wasn't clear why people in their middle years were excluded.



"I've done the seating plan, darling"

Although the evening was supposedly marking 40 years in TV, the debate weirdly measured social change since 1950. Sir David went back to the Gillingham house in which he lived 50 years ago and revealed that he would never have encountered in the Kent of then a divorced person or an illegitimate child. Back in the studio, he asked various newspaper columnists and lobbyists whether society had changed for the better.

The proper test of a theme night is whether the individual elements might have appeared on the channel in normal circumstances. It seems entirely plausible that, offered a show in which Sir David Frost asked some hacks about the shifting image of the family, BBC2 would have taken it. *Frost Night* felt like the equivalent in our television system of Cuban TV's obligation to screen lengthy hagiographical documentaries about Castro.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Virgin Mary Shelley

MEDIA NEWS

WHAT news of Greg Dyke's "war" against the bloated management left by John Birt? Not much. Current vacancies include:

HR Services co-ordinators, a Strategic Analyst; New Ventures and Strategy, Accounts Managers; Business Support and Management, Facilities Co-ordinators, Assistant Accountants, Assistant Management Accountants, Management Accountants, Project Accountants, a Senior Management Accountant, and an Assistant to a Management Development Adviser. Lean and hungry or what?

VIEWERS of BBC news are being treated to more and more "squishyvision" as items filmed in widescreen are carelessly mixed into the standard 4:3 ratio. The result is that some contributors appear to have stretched or, worse, to have put on piles of weight overnight.

The official line is that it doesn't matter because viewers won't notice, so why waste money teaching production staff how to get it right? Good to see traditional high standards thriving.

AMID rumours of redundancies and the pruning of expenses comes news that at least one BBC boss has taken pity on his beleaguered troops this Christmas.

Rupert Gavin, millionaire theatrical impresario and chief executive of BBC Worldwide, the corporation's commercial arm, has sent round an email offering staff the "Perfect Xmas Party Treat!" It turns out to be a special offer of discounted seats to a top West End show... *Puppetry of the Penis* at the Whitehall Theatre, in which two chaps display the ancient Australian art of genital origami, performing such favourites as "the Loch Ness Monster", "the Kentucky Fried Chicken" and "the Windsurfer".

Just the thing to cheer up male staff about to get the chop!

THE outlook for British Sky Broadcasting looked bleak on 5 December when the office of fair trading (OFT) launched a new probe into the company's supply of pay-TV to its rivals.

Most rivals allege that BSkyB's prices were so high they were being fleeced beyond endurance. And the OFT's announcement was rotten news for everyone at BSkyB. At the very least a lot of "commercially sensitive" information will have to be released to the OFT, which could only be interesting to BSkyB's competitors.

Then, the next morning, a very strange thing happened. Tony Ball, BSkyB's chief executive who is forever "talking up" his own company, suddenly sold every BSkyB share he was allowed to sell. He "exercised" his options on the small proportion of shares he can sell before 2001 and walked away with just under £6m extra in his pocket.

A Sky spokesman was quoted in the *Financial Times* as saying: "He was entitled to do it. It was his first opportunity to get cash. He has a young family." Indeed: and until now they have had to scrape by on his salary of just £700,000 a year.

For some reason the sale of his shares was not reported on Sky News, or in the *Sun*, the *News of the World* or the *Sunday Times* or the *Times*, all of which, like BskyB, are owned by the greatest share dealer of them all, Rupert Murdoch.

A LEAKED briefing to staff at Sky Digital customer services last month was obviously timed to coincide with Sky's animated advertising campaign featuring a friendly Sky Digital installer whose cheery catch phrase is "Up with the birds".

The cartoon character's real life colleagues may thank the author of the memo for the reminder that under no circumstances should installers' mobile phone numbers be given to customers, but customers are unlikely to relish the following instructions.

If a customer's "Digibox" is faulty on the day of arrival, they will receive a new box; but if the Digibox turns out to be faulty the day *after* installation, they will only receive a "refurbished" – ie patched-up – box.

DUMB BRITAIN

This Morning, ITV

Richard Madeley: When was the Battle of Hastings?
A: 1866.

The Weakest Link, BBC

Anne Robinson: In literature, complete the title of this well-known children's novel: *Swallows and...*
A: Butterflies.
AR: Which British politician gave the infamous "rivers of blood" speech in 1968?
A: Harold Macmillan.
AR: In music, what was the first name of the German composer Bach, who was born in 1685?
A: Edward.
AR: What does a bat use to facilitate flying in the dark?
A: Its wings.
AR: Which bird gives its name to a straight-legged marching step?
A: The cuckoo.
AR: What is the correct name for the Australian wild dog?
A: The dingbat.
AR: In literature, the poet Philip Larkin was born in what century?
A: The 17th.

University Challenge, BBC.

Jeremy Paxman: Which South American politician overthrew Allende in a coup?
Contestant 1: Ayatollah Khomeini.
Contestant 2: Chile.

Live and Kicking, BBC.

Presenter: What is the highest mountain in Britain?
Confident teenage contestant: Mount Everest.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON – AT XMAS

KNIFE & PACKER

JEZ'S PARENTS' HOUSE
MOTHER, YOU SHOULD KNOW BY NOW, THERE IS NO WAY I'M EATING THAT TURKEY...
I'M SORRY, DEAR. I HAD NO IDEA YOU'D TURNED VEGETARIAN
I'M NOT VEGETARIAN, IT'S JUST THAT YOU HAVEN'T PAN-FRIED IT WITH ENDIVES AND BECHAMEL SAUCE. I MEAN, HAVEN'T YOU PEOPLE HEARD OF JAMIE OLIVER?!?

IN a recent episode of *Celebrity*, ITV presenter Andi Peters thanked Channel 4's teenage slot *T4* "for very kindly allowing us to show an exclusive peek of June Sarpong and Dermot O'Leary's brilliant interview with Robbie Williams".

Later in the show he gave another mention to "good old Channel 4 – they always get everything".

Is the host of *Celebrity* by any chance related to the Andi Peters who was behind the creation of *T4* and is currently masterminding the slot's move into regular early evening broadcasts on Channel 4's new digital channel, E4?

GOING LIVE

HELEN MORTON's live 3am piece for GMTV about the wedding of Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones was even more pointless than we thought (see last *Eye*).

Morton was broadcasting live from Los Angeles while the wedding itself was in New York.

More recently GMTV went live to Rachel Ward for the latest news of the Nice summit in France. "The French hold the EU presidency – hence the summit being in Nice," she revealed from a summit-less Downing Street in England.

Plugged In

Must see TV: Thanks For The Mammaries *(Sky One, 10pm)* Of all The Sun's cultural gifts to Britain, none stands out more proudly than the Page 3 girl.

Garry Bushell, *The Sun*

Nominated by Francis Harvey.

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

AD NAUSEAM

IT WOULD appear the marketing bigwigs of the four mobile phone companies have gone simultaneously ga-ga. Telecommunications advertising is a mess: all techno-gobbledygook and thicko-metaphor meaning we can no longer differentiate an Orange from a lemon, and even if we could we wouldn't know what they were offering. Worse still, they are some of the largest advertisers in the country, so the cant is unavoidable.

BTCellnet has chosen to push its WAP phones for Christmas, telling us, like all its competitors, that we can send emails on a bus, get our deodorant delivered by a poodle and so on. This is still being peddled as revelatory new technology, even though WAP has made the impact of a falling leaf. Given that (as ever) the Japanese have come up with something much better called iMode, it is disingenuous, not to say patronising, of BTCellnet to be flogging dead technology as if it were the latest thing.

Everyone else, of course, is ensnared in takeover wrangles with European behemoths, and as a result their marketing is aimless and indistinct. The once-mighty Orange has now been swallowed by France Telecom, so the advertising account is to be shifted from unfortunate minnows WCRS to a "global agency". For a sniff of what's to come, try to recall some utterly baffling posters a month or two ago that featured a pair of hands with orange squares projected on to their palms. They might have made you think "Ah... Orange", but then again so would a picture of an orange.

Poor old One2One is plainly on the way out thanks to a failed joint venture with Richard "Midas Touch" Branson and a German buy-out, who are looking to kill off the brand altogether. Their recent work ("Our vouchers go on&on") is hardly landmark stuff and looks distinctly crestfallen and dated. But it's hard to make people remember a name that is destined to be forgotten.

Which leaves only Vodafone. Few campaigns in recent years can have been quite as irritating as their "man in black" spots, where a semi-famous actor puts paid to any future career prospects by dancing around in strange locations and generally being our pal. This, by the way, is a new campaign from Vodafone's new "global" agency, so the future's bright.

QUIN'S PARENTS' HOUSE
I'M SICK OF MONOPOLY!!! IT'S A RIDICULOUS GAME... I FIND IT PERSONALLY INSULTING...
OH COME ON, QUIN, YOU'RE JUST BEING A BAD LOSER
IT'S NOT THAT. HOW CAN I TAKE IT SERIOUSLY WHEN ISLINGTON'S SO ABSURDLY UNDERVALUED
ANGEL £100

DOING THE ROUNDS

Brain surgery special

TWO patients have contacted M.D. having suffered complications after brain surgery in Bristol. Both had pituitary tumours removed by the same surgeon at Frenchay hospital, part of the North Bristol NHS Trust (NBNT), and both now have permanent damage to their visual fields.

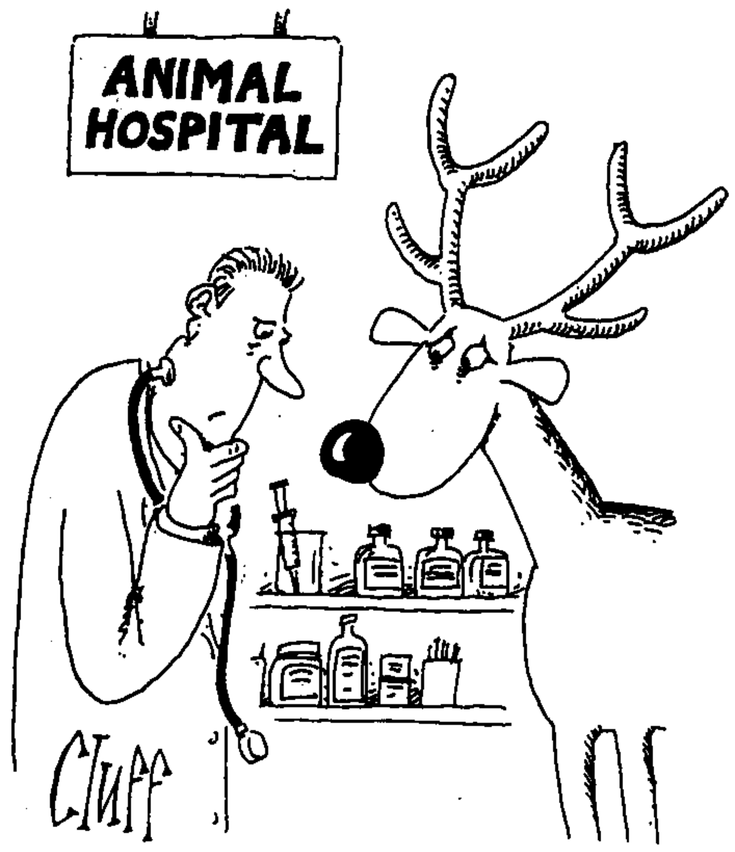
They want to know if they were just unlucky or whether they got a sub-standard service. Having met with the usual wall of secrecy from the NHS, they're now asking other patients who may have suffered similar complications to contact them via the *Eye*.

This style of campaign was used by the Bristol Heart Children's Action Group who, by sheer weight of numbers, skill and determination, forced a public inquiry into the standards of child heart surgery in Bristol. Similar patient groups have forced inquiries into allegations of discriminatory treatment for Down's syndrome children at the Royal Brompton; organ retention at Alder Hey (and elsewhere); the use of research ventilators in North Staffordshire; and dodgy gynaecology in Kent. They have also teamed up with the media to force the Shipman inquiry to be held in public.

Doctors on the whole find such groups very threatening, especially if they have something to hide; but the profession and the NHS have only themselves to blame for laying themselves open to challenges to their competence. Their key failing has been a complete inability to define and enforce guidelines for best practice.

Audit is still very patchy across the NHS and rendered largely meaningless by the lack of agreed standards for it to be measured against. This was glaringly exposed by the General Medical Council who declared that the Bristol heart surgeons had fallen well below an "acceptable standard" without giving any statistical definition of what "acceptable" is.

Without the ability to quantify competence, there are no checks on it and the same variability in results that happened (and may still be happening) in child heart surgery is happening in every specialty. Conversely, when surgery goes wrong as a result of bad luck or because of the disease itself, surgeons can find it extremely difficult to prove they were up to the task. At present far too much complex surgery is done by too many surgeons, leaving each with statistically meaningless results that can mask countless cock-ups.



Pituitary surgery is just about waking up to this. In the *BMJ* (8 May 1999), John S. Bevan, a consultant endocrinologist at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, stressed the importance of treatment by specialist multidisciplinary teams in regional centres who all comply with best practice, rather than the hugely variable preparation and monitoring of patients that currently occurs. "Pituitary surgery should always be performed by a specialist surgeon. This is particularly important for patients with hormonally active tumours where surgical skill is a critical determinant of success."

In September 1999 another paper looked at surgery for pituitary tumours that cause acromegaly, or overgrowth, and found that of 73 patients operated on by nine surgeons in Manchester, fewer than 20 percent had a successful outcome. In Birmingham, where eight surgeons operated, the success rate was 33 percent. When a single surgeon took over, the success rate doubled to 66 percent. In Oxford, Newcastle and at Barts the operations are also done by a single surgeon and the success rate ranges from 42 to 56 percent.

This is clearly bad luck for the patients who got a surgeon who only did the operation occasionally, but – as with most of medicine – incompetence is near impossible to prove. The same is likely to be true of the situation in Bristol. In July 1999 M.D. received concerns raised by a consultant about the standard of pituitary surgery there (see *Eye* 983). The consultant described himself as "really worried" and said of one surgeon: "We have done our best to steer pituitary patients away from him... the life of one of my patients has been all but ruined by a dramatic reduction in his visual field after surgery."

M.D. immediately contacted the General Medical Council, the Royal College of Surgeons and the chief executive of NBNT and asked that the matter be investigated. Sixteen months later I've been told that an internal audit has found no statistical difference in the outcomes from the two surgeons, *and their results are comparable to elsewhere in the UK*. However, none of the audit has been made public and there is still no defined standards or prospective national database of pituitary surgery in the UK to compare the results of different centres. As with most complex surgery, neurosurgeons are allowed to delve into brains without having to prove they're any good at it.

Meanwhile, the consultant who raised concerns suffered a fair degree of professional vilification, including a call for his sacking from a board member of NBNT for daring to question the quality of the service. He now doubts he would whistleblow again and says: "I have retired hurt from pituitary politics... I just see the damage." Perhaps another pressure group of damaged patients is the only way to call the service to account.

M.D.

DOWN ON THE FARM

Christmas: Tree Special

QUITE a few people have begun to realise that global warming is going to be a problem. Not just a "droughts-and-floods-where-coloured-people-live" problem, but a closer to home Oh-my-God-we're-all-going-to-die kind of problem.

All is not lost, however: the government has a cunning plan. Under the snappily named "England Rural Development Programme", which is Eurospeak for "things we can get the farmers to do now we don't need their food anymore", we are being offered huge grants to grow "energy crops" such as willow coppice which can be used as fuel in (as yet unbuilt) power stations.

Besides keeping farmers in gainful employment, this will allow the UK to claim progress towards commitments on greenhouse gases as well as renewable energy — a nice example of joined-up government and actually a really sound idea. Just one small niggle: it will never work, and for one very simple reason.

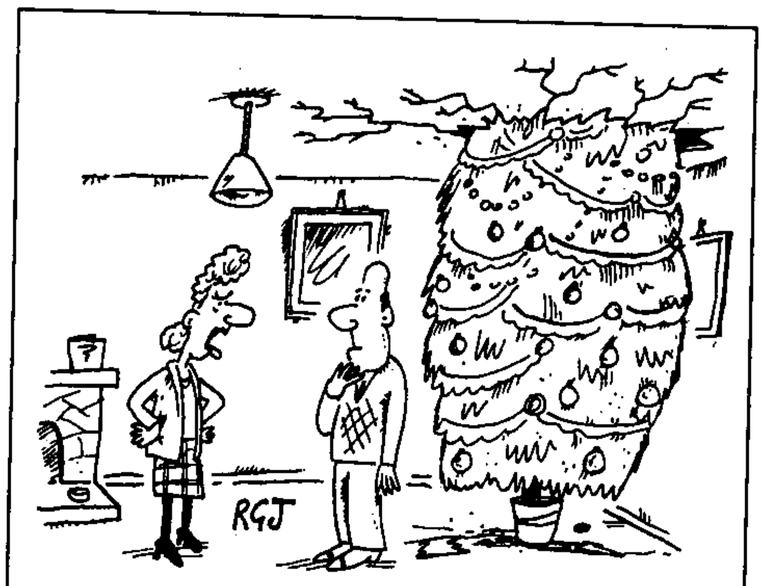
Woodfuel is exactly the same stuff as any other woodfibre, of which the UK is a giant consumer, using more than 30m tonnes a year. And where does it all come from? Imports! Not, as is commonly believed, because we have already used up every last stick of our own but because it is cheaper to bring it in.

There are at least a million acres of derelict woodland in the UK, mainly in the south of England, and there is no market for the wood (as opposed to timber) of a much larger area. Millions of tonnes of annual production rots in the woods. Energy crops are a way of producing more of what we already cannot sell; and, despite the massive subsidy, at a higher cost. Exactly like the rest of UK forestry, in fact.

The Forestry Commission, which knows all this, is keeping quiet and pushing the energy crops scheme. After all, if it became publicly known that its job is completely pointless, its officers might feel a little insecure.

The sad part is that it *should* work because we shouldn't be buying all that woodfibre. Despite some recent improvements in timber buying policy, the UK still has no rules on the import of wood. This means it comes from the cheapest source — virtually all from unsustainable, and much of it from illegal, logging. While the UK continues to be the dustbin for much of the world's destroyed forests, and while so much of our own resource is unused, farmer grown crops are likely to come a poor third.

'Gumboot'



"What sort of an idiot buys a Christmas leylandii?"

Down on the Fish Farm

IF FAKE salmon from Scotland is on your Christmas dinner menu you might care to ask your supplier these questions before slicing the lemon:

1. Which farm did the fish come from? **2**. Is infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) suspected on the farm? **3**. Did the fish have infectious pancreatic necrosis? **4**. Has the fish been exposed to cardiomyopathy syndrome? **5**. What level of dioxins is present in the fish? **6**. Is the farm in coastal waters where toxic algal blooms are present? **7**. During its caged life, what chemicals was the fish dosed with?

One banned neurotoxic insecticide, ivermectin, has been used for years on Scottish fish farms. In 1994, 11 percent of random samples of supermarket salmon taken by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) tested positive for ivermectin. In VMD samples from fish farms between January and June this year, 10 percent revealed the use of ivermectin. So, not much change there, then.

Be circumspect about fake salmon bearing an "organic" label, too. Unless the seller is able to answer the above questions, how much reliance should we place on organic claims? This also applies to the much-vaunted "Tartan Quality" sticker, the use of which is approved by an organisation funded by fish farmers (see *Eye* 24 Dec 1999).

A lorry carrying Orkney fake salmon, on their way to market from an ISA-suspected site, spilled its load into a field at the end of November. The field was disinfected "to prevent the possibility of contamination from the salmon blood". The report said the fish would be "...chopped up along with other fish offal and waste for... onward delivery to Norway for reprocessing into animal food."

Whatever, the cost of fake salmon this Christmas will make it look like a gift from Santa. The price has slumped to £1.40 per kilo, the lowest level ever. Why? According to Lynnette McPhearson, sales manager at Salmac Ltd: "Recent flooding in the UK has resulted in the downturn in consumer demand."

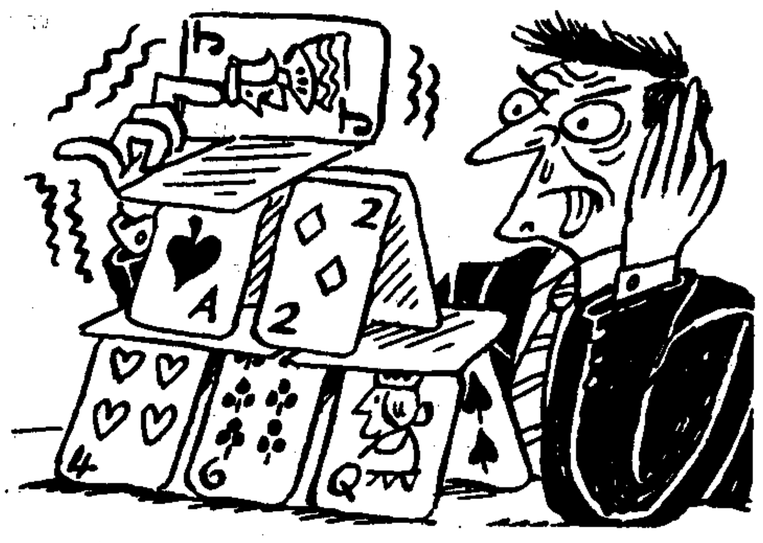
Industry sources also claim Norwegian producers are "swamping the market". Hard to swallow, given half Scotland's fake fish farms are now Norwegian owned. The truth may be that in the light of the BSE tragedy consumers are increasingly worried about allegations of disease and pollution associated with Scottish salmon farms.

'Old Trout'

"As any reader of Private Eye *will know it is fashionable and politically correct to assume that every imaginable problem is attributable to wicked fish farmers...*

– John Home Robertson, Labour MSP for East Lothian, debating the salmon preservation bill in the Scottish parliamentary debate, 23 November 2000.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS



DOWNS AND OUT

BRIGHTON and Hove council has again been caught out trying to distort the figures in a phoney "consultation" exercise over an unpopular plan.

The "new" Labour council supports third division football team Brighton and Hove Albion's vainglorious bid to build a new 25,000-seat stadium in an area of outstanding natural beauty on the South Downs outside the town (on a good day the team attracts a 6,500 crowd). It claims that 35 percent of people in the area are in favour of the stadium at Falmer. But the figure is based on responses to two distinctly dodgy exercises.

In one, just 5,000 leaflets were distributed, of which only 500 were returned. Of these 175 (ie 35 percent) were in favour. So the council is claiming a mandate to concrete over the Downs from 175 people out of a total local population of around 250,000.

The other creaking prop of justification was a flawed referendum carried out last year at the time of the local council elections. When asked "Should B&H Albion find a permanent home in the area?" 56,701 respondents out of a possible 194,084 voted "yes" and 10,989 voted "no". When asked "should the council support the B&H Albion bid for a new home in Falmer?" 44,985 said "yes" and 21,548 said "no". As in North Korea, it was only possible to vote for one candidate — at least five other possible sites being ignored. Even so, three out of four of the electorate were either indifferent to or against the scheme.

A petition in the village of Falmer, meanwhile, which will be ruined if the stadium is built, already has more than 4,000 signatures against.

PS: B&H council has plastered the town with slogans extolling Brighton as "the place to be" in support of its pretentious bid for city status. Unkind graffiti artists have been busy amending these to read, more accurately: "The place to beg."

CRYSTAL BALLS

THE latest local authority to come a cropper in the craze for building multiplex cinema complexes is Bromley council in south London.

At Bromley magistrates' court at the end of last month the council accused London mayor Ken Livingstone of wasting taxpayers' money by hiring top barrister Gerald Gouriet to represent his objection to an application for 14 liquor licences at the multiplex Bromley is determined to see built on Crystal Palace park (*Eyes passim*).

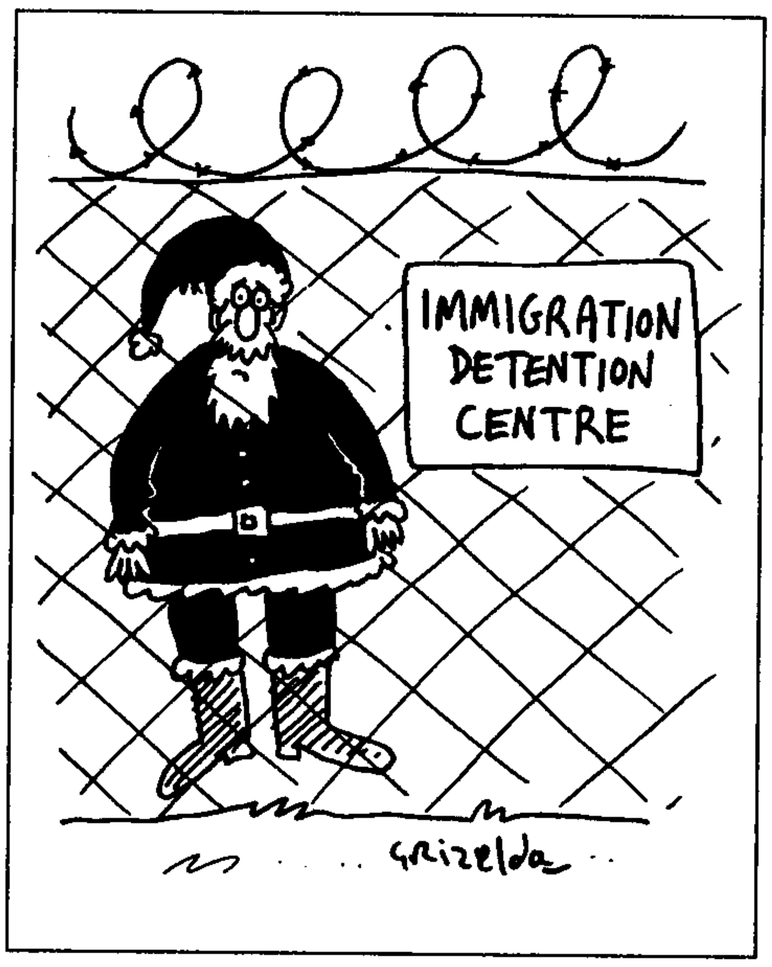
Gouriet satisfied magistrates that Ken's objection was legitimate and noted that the only extra cost to the GLA was his own fee, which he was prepared to waive if required. On the subject of wasting taxpayers' money, Bromley, which was not even a party to the licence application by developer London & Regional Properties, employed Gregory Stone QC, assisted by a junior barrister and a pupil. No mention was made of any of their fees being waived.

Gouriet castigated the council for having been "dazzled by a pot of gold" in pursuit of this folly. Local taxpayers may soon wake up to the fact that not only has their council already spent the £6m premium to be paid by the developer for the lease, but councillors and officers could face catastrophic personal surcharges if the government, at the European commission's bidding, overturns the planning permission (the commission ruled in October that the planning procedure was fatally flawed because there had been no environmental impact assessment).

Despite Stone's best efforts magistrates listened to residents' objections and chopped nearly 80,000 sq ft off the 88,000 sq ft of "mass volume vertical drinking" space L&RP had applied for. Instead of 10 pubs they will end up with one pub and 10 restaurants where patrons must be seated and consume meals served by waiters before they can buy drinks.

Other conditions included no live music, no special entertainment licences, no occasional licences and no off-sales. No wonder L&RP's Geoff Springer admitted that so far he had no takers for the huge licensed spaces in the multiplex - for which, thankfully, not a sod has yet been turned.

● **COUNCILLORS at Ashford in Kent were encouraged to see that their Tory mayor Jim Hoad had a sound grasp of the issues at a meeting at which the borough council's lawyers explained the workings of the new human rights act. As a lawyer quoted from article 1 of the act — "Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions" — Cllr Hoad was heard to mutter: "That rules out poofs for a start!"**



BORE HOLE

BIRMINGHAM is "my kind of town" says Peter Mandelson. Presumably he was referring to the city council's latest attempts to woo international business with luxury apartments, retail "concepts" and dreams of becoming European city of culture. (Mandy's position on the plan to establish Britain's first municipally-approved brothel in Brum is not clear.)

Would he and the "international business leaders" so beloved of aptly-named council leader Albert Bore be so impressed if they had to live on one of the city's grim housing estates? At least 18,000 homes out of the entire stock of 88,000 have been classified as unlettable and declared unfit for habitation, while the condition of other properties is deteriorating at a rate of £35m a year.

Delays in moving some 15,000 tenants off the waiting list and into empty properties, more than half of which have been empty more than three months, has sent the housing department's balance sheet deep into the red with a deficit forecast to be as much as £18m by April. In 1997 the council was ordered to get its housing finances under control by the district auditor. And again in 1998... and in 1999. No wonder Bore hopes to get shot of the problem by transferring the city's entire housing stock to 11 new "community landlords".

● **TOP Labour luvvie Lord Rogers, chairman of the government's urban task force, may too smug for some but he's nobody's fool. And he has no intention of becoming the fool of choleric Newcastle councillor Kevan Jones, cheerleader for the city council's brutal "Going For Growth" plan to bulldoze some 6,600 homes and replace them with yuppie flats (*Eye* 1008). Rogers was involved in drawing up early plans for the project. Now, alarmed at the stink the scheme has raised and annoyed at the council's reluctance to listen to his advice, he has wisely decided to have nothing more to do with it.**

High Principals

A MOVE to state-of-the-art premises in Greenwich next year is expected to do wonders for the profile of Trinity College of Music (TCM) — and in particular its publicity-seeking principal Gavin Henderson. The one small drawback is the cost, estimated at around £13m.

The college still needs to find £1m, and to this end it announced on 9 October that pay for non-teaching duties such as assessment would be cut from £28.81 to £15 an hour. Following massive opposition from lecturers the decision was suspended pending a working party on the issue.

The college has also announced that it does not recognise the higher and further education union, NATFHE, and has issued draft guidelines for a new contract. While the rest of the sector is battling for improved conditions to the already below par national contract and pay scale, TCM has gone one stage further and decided to abandon them altogether.

Henderson, a bow-tied PR man who is not a professional musician himself and whose background is in organising big musical festivals at Dartington and Brighton, pushes through his personal agenda at TCM with the aid of two henchmen: deputy principal Derek Aviss and assistant principal (performance) Simon Young, neither of whose job was advertised.

In response to a complaint from NATFHE about the proposed pay and conditions, Aviss wrote haughtily: "If the college does not achieve its physical relocation to Greenwich on schedule, or achieve premium funding to alleviate its worsening deficit, there will soon be no employment for any staff, whether management, administrative, or teaching."

Perhaps he and Henderson could explain why, if TCM is in such dire straits, they are pushing ahead with a performance of Schoenberg's colossal work *Gurrelieder* at the Royal Festival Hall next March. The college does not have the resources to perform this piece alone and will have to hire soloists, a male voice choir and other musicians at great expense. The principal's many detractors at TCM believe the concert has more to do with upping his own public profile than the best interests of the college.

Henderson is near fanatical about contemporary music, almost to the exclusion of the classical repertoire which students expect to learn first and foremost. One student who went to the college to study the traditional repertoire left in disgust after he spent his first two weeks singing nursery rhymes. Henderson has now introduced a compulsory course entitled "Applied Performance", which involves playing musical instruments on stilts. Not without cause are people starting to dub TCM a "circus".

By contrast the Royal College of Music, which faces many of the same difficulties, has taken an extremely positive approach towards renegotiating a new contract and recognising NATFHE. If Henderson really wants the move to Greenwich to be a success, perhaps he should take a leaf out of RCM's score.

Letters

Hot-air traffic control

Sir,

HP Sauce is always a good read but the piece on the air traffic control rebellion (Eye 1016) was complete tosh. You really shouldn't believe everything that people tell you.

There were three votes in the House of Commons on the proposal to part-privatise National Air Traffic Services on 9 May, 15 November and 28 November. Sadly, in the absence of any meaningful compromise, I felt the need to vote against my own party in parliament. The second vote referred to on 15 November was on the issue of pension entitlements for NATS staff where some progress was made. Far from abstaining I joined the majority of the so-called rebels in the government division lobby.

All these things are well known to the government whips so I really can't imagine who spun you such a yarn!

Yours sincerely,
MARTIN SALTER MP,

House of Commons.

Those MMR letters in full...

Sir,

With reference to the letter from the "expert" (Dr Friskin? I have met most experts in the autism arena, I have never heard of him) the fact is "autism" is an umbrella term for a group of disabilities and behaviours, it has many known causes (though these can be difficult to establish due to the lack of expertise).

*Regarding the MMR: parents are pleading with the Government to introduce single-dose vaccines, just not have all three (measles, mumps and rubella) in one shot; **not** to abolish them altogether! It is the actual nature of the MMR vaccine which is debatable. There does appear to be a sub-group of children diagnosed with ASD's (autistic spectrum disorders) who regressed from "normal" to "autistic" soon after receiving the MMR.*

We wait to see what Cherie and Tony do with Leo...

Yours,
LIZ LUCY (parent to Jamie, 8 yrs., non-verbal "ASD"... living in Michael Portillo's constituency, poverty-stricken, disabled-singled-mother, no school place available for my son... pleaded for years with Kensington & Chelsea for help... end of tether, etc)

website: http://autistic-information.virtualave.net

● *Allergy Induced Autism helpline can be contacted at 01733 331771 (www.AutismMedical.com). For membership details send an SAE to: AIA, 60 Victoria Road, London N22 7XF.*

MOUNTAIN bike, Concept, mens, black/white, suitable for teenager up to adult, emasculate condition,

East Anglia Daily Times

Sir,

Re: MMR Vaccination debate. While agreeing with Neil Allen that concerned parents should not expose their children to the dangers of the MMR vaccine, I would not condone the total avoidance of vaccination against measles, mumps and rubella. Measles used to be regular epidemic and its return is not something I would want to be partially responsible for.

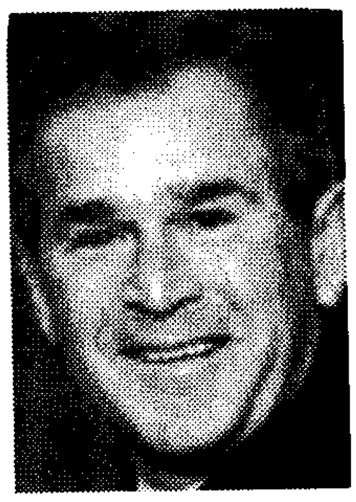
Having met parents whose children became ill following their MMR, I have not allowed my daughter to receive this vaccine. Instead I have gone to the continent to source the vaccine and have it administered (an easier option for someone living in the south-east I acknowledge). Interestingly, in contrast to Neil Allen's experience, my health visitor accepted my decision and tried (unsuccessfully) to assist to obtain the individual vaccines in the UK.

It appears to me that the solution to this dilemma lies squarely with the department of health. If they agreed to lift their draconian ban on the import and use of the individual vaccines in the UK it would allow concerned parents to make the choice between the MMR combination and separate vaccines.

Yours faithfully,
ROBIN JAMES,

Feltham, Middlesex.

Lookalike



Alfred E. Neumann

George W. Bush

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the uncanny similarity between the comic character George "Dubya" Bush and Alfred "Eeeee" Neumann, the internationally respected face of MAD magazine?

DONALD DYER,

Florida, USA.

LUVVIES

"I'm perpetually in conflict between the person who wants to go and disappear and the person who is interested. I always think I'm just barely balancing, you know? I do believe you have to have some sort of engine, some hidden sense of outrage."

Glenn Close, *Mail on Sunday*

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Far Eastern region

Sir

As it is not made explicit, I wonder what the "very high costs" can be that Mr Mackellar refers to (Letters, 1015), concerning Japan's railways. If he is suggesting that, were Britain to have an equally efficient railway system, the costs would be passed on to the taxpayer and/or passengers, he's got more cheek than a cockney barrow boy.

Firstly, rail fares in Japan are generally cheaper than in the UK (and this is without taking the higher cost of living into consideration; so in real terms the difference is greater still). In comparison the private UK rail companies' fares are already among the highest in the world, whilst providing an evidently inferior service. Secondly, need he be reminded that, following privatisation, the private rail companies and Railtrack received around double the annual subsidy that BR received before privatisation?

In addition to this more millions of taxpayers' money has just been pledged to Railtrack, merely to make the network "safe". Need he and the public be reminded that had BR received the same levels of subsidy, the UK may now have a national rail system that was as efficient as those in Europe and Japan?

J. FYNE,

Shizuoka, Japan.

Second opinion

Sir,

Poor old M.D. obviously had a "bad round day" before Eye 1015 and joined in the general chorus of "Doctor slagging" with gusto following the disturbing letter from Mark Timlett. But where does he get the idea that surgeons enjoy virtual immunity from action against negligence when they operate in private hospitals?

Private practice is not covered by crown indemnity so medical insurance has to be arranged to cover claims for negligence before any hospital will allow a surgeon to operate. Compensation is only paid when negligence has been proved, which may or may not be difficult. Sometimes claims are immediately settled out of court if the doctor's actions are indefensible, but sometimes they are defended. Occasionally a maimed patient does not receive compensation because negligence could not be proved, which is why many of us favour "no fault compensation" — even though we are told that it would be too expensive. Occasionally however, patients make spurious claims and they are the only ones who enjoy immunity from action.

M.D. also seems to have forgotten that most private practitioners in this country are contracted "maximum part-time" to the NHS. Their private practice depends on referrals from GPs and if the service they give their NHS patients is rubbish, then their private practice will be likewise.

Finally, anaesthetists do not put in regional blocks to bump up their fee, attractive as such an augmentation might be to something which is usually a third of the surgeon's and a sixth of the hospital's. They do it simply to stop their patients waking up in agony and include it as part of the general anaesthetic.

Yours faithfully,
DR D.M. JACKSON,

Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

AGENCY PARTY
HEY, LET'S FIND THE OFFICE PHOTOCOPIER AND TAKE PICTURES OF OUR BUMS!!!
I TRIED THAT BUT I COULDN'T FIND ONE ANYWHERE!
APPARENTLY IT'S A ROUND, FLESHY THING...
NOPE, STILL CAN'T FIND ONE!

Change of Herts

Sir,

In Doing the Rounds (17 November) M.D. has once again quoted a letter that I wrote nearly two years ago now to illustrate his comments on private practice.

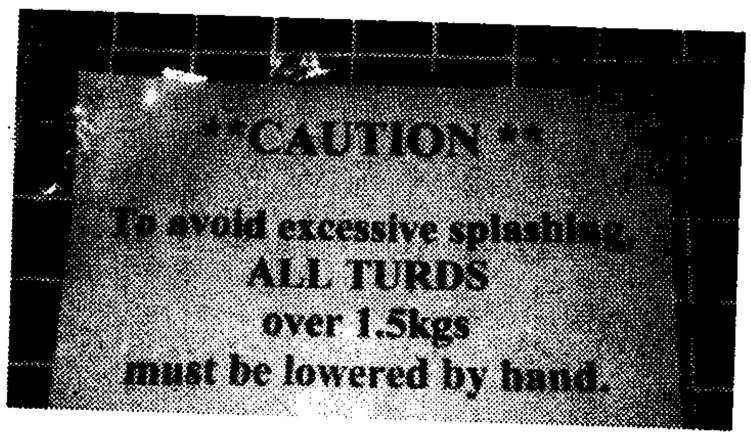
I would wish to point out that since that letter was written, the situation has changed considerably in our local area, and I wouldn't like his article to suggest to any of our local people that my very deeply held concerns at that time still reflect local practice in this part of the country.

Indeed, I am very happy to report that the application of clinical governance in this area has led to considerable improvements with regard to the concerns I expressed.

Yours faithfully,
MR BEVERLEY WEBB,

Letchworth, Herts.

I-SPY *Raratongan Hotel, Cook Islands*



Submitted by Jeremy Horsell. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

A pedant writes...

Sir,

You have a Pilbrow cartoon on page 15 of Eye 1016 which shows four panic-stricken, carol-singing penguins aboard a small and rapidly melting iceberg with one of them reading a newspaper article about global warming. The caption reads "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas".

This is surely misconceived and therefore unfunny.

The intention was presumably to show the ultimate demise of a polar ice cap due to the greenhouse effect. But penguins live at the South Pole and so their illustrated predicament would be quite unlikely because they would simply swim to the Antarctic landmass.

At the North Pole, however, there is merely frozen sea water and therefore the desired joke can be properly achieved by replacing the penguins with polar bears.

Regards,
RICHARD B. GEORGE,
Via e-mail.

Muckspreader caned

Sir,

Edward Barrow tells it how it is when he takes issue with Muckspreader (Letters, 17 Nov) and says that the "European sugar market has been massively rigged for years against efficient cane producers in the developing world". In this and a number of other fields (bananas being a famous exception) the EU (not so much the European commission as the member states) has hidden behind its Lomé convention development assistance pact and ignored the cry from its Lomé partners - particularly West Indians - that they want "Trade not Aid!"

The Caribbean's own "Iron Lady" Dame Eugenia Charles (the only woman ever known to make La Thatch look, sound and behave subdued), then Dominican Prime Minister, put this in its proper context at a ministerial meeting in Brussels in 1987. "You people", she said, "you encourage us to grow this or that and then, when we've grown it, you don't want it after all or you offer us some pitiful price for it. No wonder a lot of people in the Caribbean are thinking of turning to a different cash crop altogether: ganja. There's never a fall in demand for that and the price only seems to go up".

Deathly hush on the European community benches.

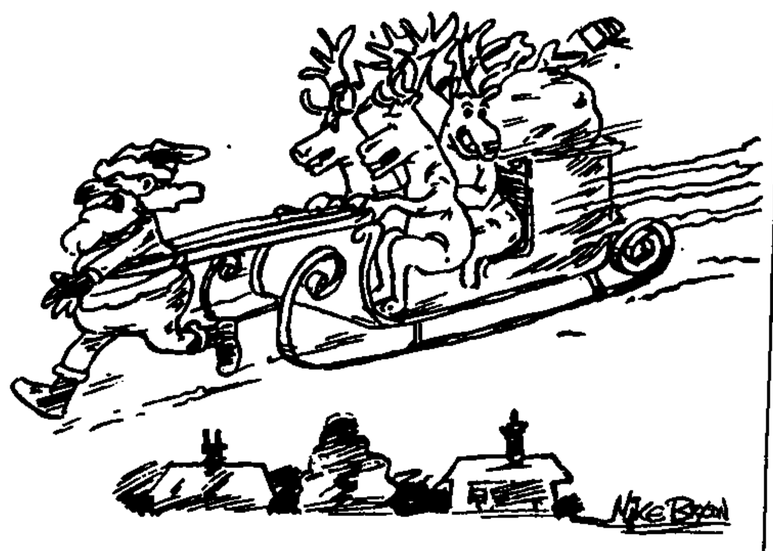
Regards,
PATRICK BROOKS,
Via e-mail.

Struck dumb

Sir,

Your Dumb Britain column would amuse me much more if it didn't make me out to look dumb, cos I ain't. Even without the pressure of a camera on me, I racked my brains in vain for a boy's name which is also the name of a bird – Robin is almost as rare as Peregrine these days. Such is the all-pervasive nature of popular culture, that if I am asked about "the Vicar of...", then "Dibley" automatically springs to mind. And even my wife, who has a classical education and is the editor of an academic magazine, isn't sure about who wrote "Wives and Daughters" (D.H. Lawrence?). Please could you at least publish the correct answers.

LES HITCHINS,
Via e-mail. (No. Ed.)



"Oh, why did I bring in that management consultant?"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"There's Thierry Henry, exploding like the French train that he is."
DAVID PLEAT, ITV
(Philip Dowling)

"Paulo di Canio is capable of scoring the goal he scored."
BRYAN ROBSON, BBC1
(Keith Campbell)

"Sex with a mistress greatly increases the chances of having a stroke."
FEMALE NEWSCASTER, Channel 5
(Patrick Brogan)

"Without the ball, he [Totti] is a different player."
PETER BRACLEY, Channel 4
(Pete Lund)

"The defender was lightning slow."
RON ATKINSON
(Jon Walker)

Colemanballs 10

The new book is selling out fast!
If you have difficulty getting it, try **W.H. Smuggs** who've also got the new **Eye Annual** and **Albion** books. But hurry...!
The ideal Christmas presents.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

AT CHRISTMAS PEOPLE LEAVE HOME TO GOTO VISIT THEIR FAMILIES..
..THIS CAN ENCOURAGE CRIME.
TWO MATRICIDES. A PATRICIDE AND SIX DRUNKEN UNCLES
NO MILK FOR A WEEK
MURDER LIST

Letter from **Georgia**
from Our Own Correspondent

WE always used to tell people that our country was not really in Europe and not really in Asia, but these days an old African joke seems more appropriate. "What did we use before we had candles? Electricity!"

It is especially hard to laugh given that Georgia is somewhat colder than Africa and winter is closing in quickly. In the bad old days of Soviet dictatorship we used to get regular electricity and hot water pumped directly to our homes, even those of us who lived in remote mountain villages. For years we have been Nato's best friends in the Caucasus, so we had expected things to change.

We had sort of assumed that they would the change would be for the better. Ours was the only country around here to support the bombing of our Orthodox brothers in Yugoslavia. We have been teaching English in our schools instead of Russian and replacing Cyrillic signs with the Roman alphabet. Nato observers are always welcome to come and snoop around our border to get an idea of what is going on in Chechnya. Lord George Robertson was here only a few weeks ago to show us how important we are and how admired is our silver-haired, silver-tongued leader Eduard Shevardnadze, the "White Fox".

A couple of rude assassination attempts apart, we are fond of him. When he was Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign minister rather than president of this pretty little country he helped to prevent the end of the world, as he doesn't shrink from telling anyone who'll listen. So much is our admiration for the venerable 72-year-old that he was easily reelected this year. He could probably have won without the stuffed ballot boxes and the slightly unusual counting system, but some old habits die hard.

Even before the winter this had been a difficult year. Hundreds of thousands of people are hungry after drought turned our best cornfields and vineyards to dust and emptied dams which should now be generating power. Some of our people are selling their clothes to buy food. Others seem to prefer hunger to freezing to death.

Then there is the border with Chechnya. Chechens have been crossing for hundreds of years to raid our villages, but now the Russians sporadically accuse us of helping them fight their separatist war. True, we accepted some refugees; but they terrify our own gentle police and have even been taking over their rackets in the border valleys.

Once we gave the Soviet Union Stalin. Possibly the Russians are no longer grateful. Or maybe they feel offended that we no longer look to them to defend us now we have our Nato friends. Bit by bit Russian troops, here to ensure the peace after a couple of wars they helped to start, are leaving. But plenty remain. Last month's Russian plane crash in the "Autonomous Republic of Adjara" showed how many were still in a part of the country far beyond the old Fox's control.

So what about our new friends? Well, we have to thank the European Union for sending us some equipment to help us defend ourselves against Chechen aggression. The field showers will, we are sure, be very effective. We just haven't worked out yet how to use them against a Kalashnikov round. We, or at least some of our soldiers, are supposed to play some Nato wargames next year. The army is hoping that even if it doesn't pick up much on tactics it might be able to get its troops fed for a little while – the defence ministry recently warned that the guardians of what little order we have were actually starving.

Our wines may not really be among the world's best and our Black Sea resorts no longer pull many tourists – not that many of the beaches are under government control anyway – but we always believed we had our strategic location to bargain with. Georgia is the perfect place to build the oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean, to allow our neighbouring democratic paragon Azerbaijan and its chums at BP to pump growing volumes of oil without having to send it through Russia or Iran. Although work hasn't started yet, the pipe is supposed to be finished by 2004. We can only hope that we will all be around to see it.

The White Fox himself has warned that growing anger and protests over the constant blackouts threaten the very existence of our country. We hope somebody will take note. We really don't care who it is, but could that somebody please turn the lights back on?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

"You engaged in behaviour that was not just odd, it was criminal," Judge David Heckler told Samuel Feldman as he passed sentence in Bucks County, Philadelphia. "Your actions rose to the level of vandalism, and caused great harm to many people. I hereby sentence you to 180 days' probation, and order you to pay $1,000 restitution. And I strongly advise you to rely on the sell-by dates from now on. That is what they're there for."

Feldman (a thirty-eight-year-old advertising executive known locally as "The Cookie Crumbler") had been charged by police with criminal mischief, after causing $80,000 worth of damage to loaves and cookies in Philadelphian supermarkets over a two-year period. During the trial, he told the court "I probably do touch too much bread, yes, more than the next person. I admit that. Even my wife says that I am a picky shopper, but I am only trying to ensure freshness for my family. It is only by much poking and prodding of baked goods that I can be sure they are not stale when I buy them. Does that make me a criminal?"

On his arrest, Feldman had told police officers "you've got the wrong man," and had later claimed that "the real bread squeezer is still on the loose." But he was found guilty after supermarket surveillance footage showed him crumbling and damaging hundreds of loaves and boxes of cookies. *(The Philadelphia Inquirer, 21/11/00. Spotter: Stuart Reid)*

—o—

"Contrary to popular belief, dinosaurs were not wiped out by a meteorite," the China Youth Daily told its readers, "nor did they become extinct after some planetary catastrophe. Chinese scientists have proved that they were, in fact, destroyed by the power and potency of their own wind.

"Research has shown that dinosaur wind contained an exceptionally high proportion of methane gas, lethal enough to penetrate the ozone layer. The animals, weighing between eighty and a hundred tonnes each, would eat on average between 130kg and 260kg of food every day. This would cause them to pass wind non-stop. During their hundred million year existence, their population grew to many tens of millions, all of them producing massive amounts of flatus. The atmosphere of the earth gradually became charged with methane, which finally damaged the ozone layer and brought about great changes in the vegetation. These caused a food shortage which eventually wiped them out. Chinese scientists are the first to have verified this." *(Food Processor Magazine [Australia] October/November 2000. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

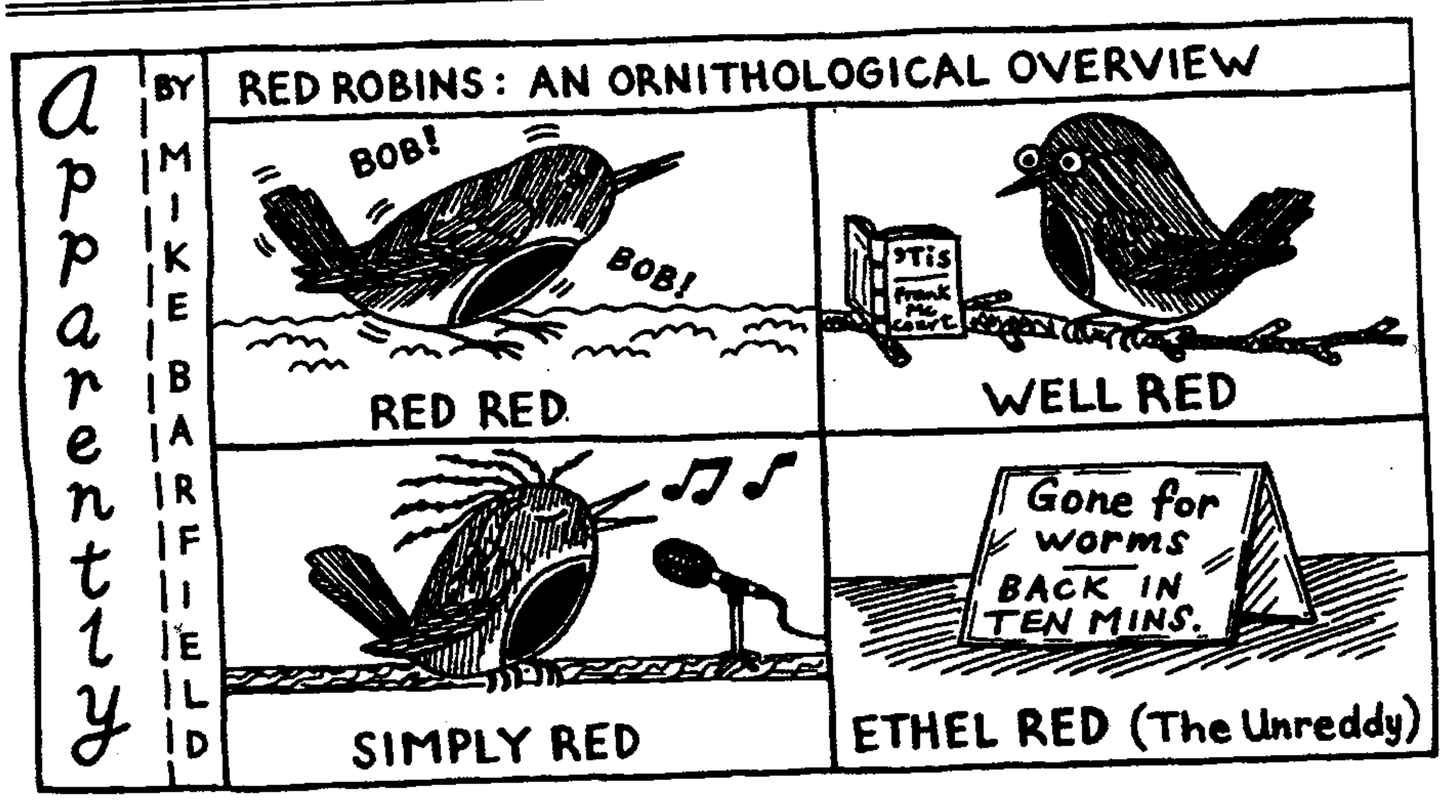
—o—

"Nothing about my client's behaviour with his dog is in any way cruel or hurtful," attorney Jaspar Monti told a San Francisco court, "nothing at all. He is simply mimicking the primal dog pattern of male dominance, which naturally involves a great deal of oral contact with the dog's neck and mouth."

Monti was defending Stephen Maul, a twenty-four-year-old furniture mover who had been charged with two felony counts of cruelty to his Labrador puppy. "My client understands how to tap into the primal instincts of dogs, by getting down on all fours and becoming canine. He is very oral, and has often French-kissed his puppy, as well as biting it on the

neck. This is normal behaviour among dogs in the wild, and it is the most direct and efficient way to maintain training. But some members of the public clearly did not understand this and mistakenly thought he was being cruel. There is no case to answer."

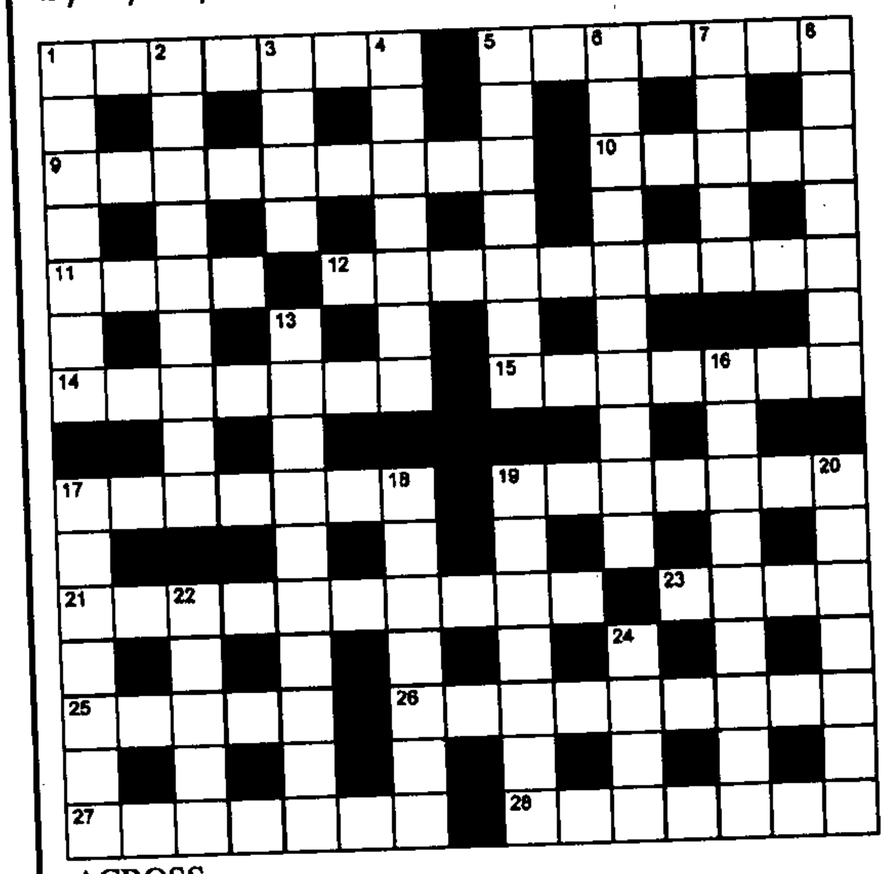
Mr Maul was later found not guilty of cruelty. (San Francisco Chronicle, 14/11/00. Spotter: Bob Pierson)



EYE CROSSWORD 172

by Cyclops

£100 prize



ACROSS

1 A side issue of Clinton (7)
5 Mouthy Washington 'flower' is too camp to get screwed (7)
9 Top dog/cat who puts pressure on colleagues (5,4)
10 Idiot responsible for two resigning Labour ministers (5)
11 Before Lady Thatcher (4)
12/7/16 Lord King set about getting one pissed on mild ('Soldiers'), as you might expect from the wait? (3,4,3,5,9)
14 Issue of age surrounding Diana and sex reversion (7)
15 Celebrated hack imposing silence on Brenda with tabloid backing (7)
17 Crapper's first loo exploited good North East toilet water (7)
19 Isn't able to get into reservation, so withdraws (7)
21 Not having sex muscles can (consequently lacks aspiration) (10)
23 Sound pissed when pop group gets new leader (4)
25 Broken king needs a lay (5)
26 Monarch besotted with a new news presenter (9)
27 Liar, cad — surprisingly not conservative! (7)
28 Government enterprise swallows up political understanding (7)

DOWN

1 Conservative leader has nothing on Michael as a desensitiser (7)
2 It takes real idiot to make a leader! (9)
3/17dn. An innocuous Christmas item — criminal (4,7)
4 Like heroin-depressed political diarist (7)
5 Pulp fiction — your empty American writer's material (7)
6 Congress might follow this state and cut scene out about 'ME' (10)
7 See 12 Across
8 Defeat party politician with unfinished question (7)
13 Jack elected with gusto — one southern jerk inclined to foreigner-bashing (10)
16 See 12 Across
17 See 3
18 Take a challenging look at magazine nut (7)
19 Salvage Brenda, overturned by revolution (7)
20 One way to introduce drug ring, yes, is to shilly-shally (7)
22 Jerk off DI — it's quite palatable (5)
24 Currently, Tory leader makes sod all (4)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 19.12.00. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.

Solution to Crossword No. 171

Winner: JOHN TIERNEY

ACROSS: 1 Sushi 4 Legislate 9 Branson 10 Groucho 11 Lager lout 12 Paddy 13 Sodomy 14 Merchant 17 Pisspoor 19 Victim 22 Orion 24 Zookeeper 26 Literal 27 Anatomy 28 South Bank 29 Email.

DOWN: 1 Sibyl 2 Shagged 3/23/4 Its Grim Up North London 5 Go-getter 6 Scoop 7 Arcadia 8 Ecosystem 13 Sophocles 15 Crime wave 16 Godzilla 18 Shiatsu 20 Tapioca 21 Mohawk 25 Royal.

ENGLAND WIN SUMMIT

by Our Cricket Staff **ED NO-BALLS**

A JUBILANT England team pulled off a historic last-minute triumph after a gruelling five-day battle in Nice which had seemed destined to end in a draw.

Said Captain Nasser Blair, "They tried everything – an unlevel playing field, time-wasting, cheating and intimidation – but we stuck in there and won."

Spin

"The light was fading and none of us could see what we were doing, but this victory puts England back on the map – outside Europe."

Tony Hussein is 47 not out.

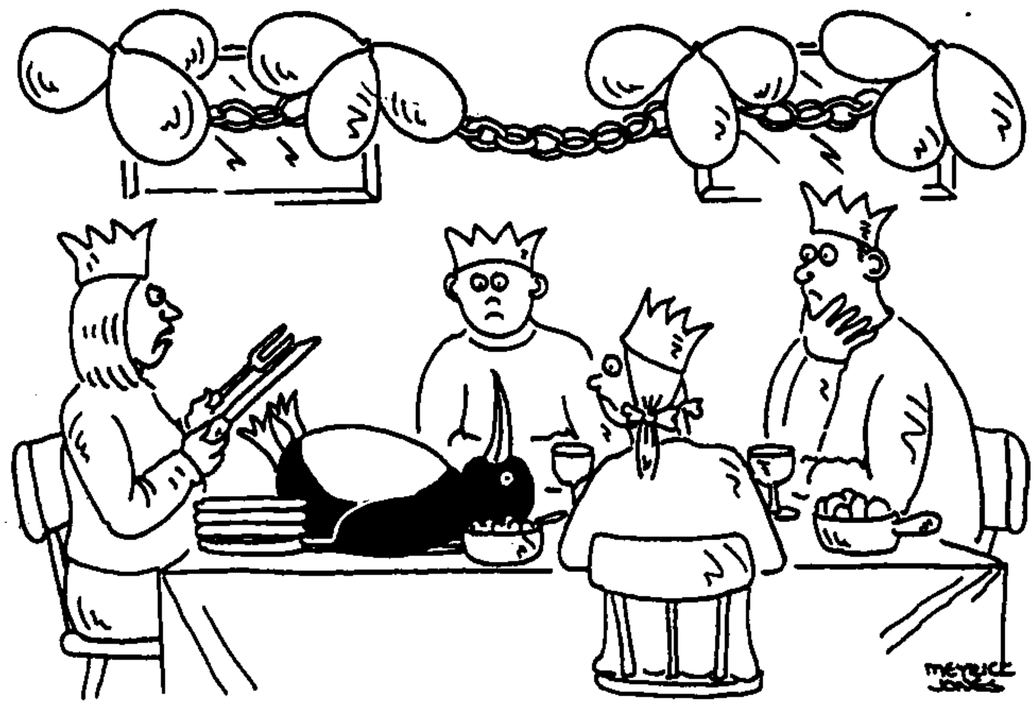
THAT HISTORIC NICE AGREEMENT

1. **All countries in the enlarged EU will agree to this agreement.**
2. **Unless they don't want to, in which case they will agree to disagree.**
3. **Er...**
4. **That's it.**

The next historic summit will be held in 2004.

Modern Nursery Rhymes No. 94

Old Macdonald had a train.
E-I-E-I-O.
And on that train there were 2,000 people (because the previous three had been cancelled).
E-I-E-I-O.
With a "Hello darling, I'm on the train" here, and
A "Hello darling, I'm still on the train" there,
Everywhere a "This is disgraceful, I'm going to write to the Times",
Lord Macdonald had a job.
Y-O-Y-O-Y?



"Because Delia Smith says so — that's why!"

The Christmas Story Retold

From the Book of Common Rocky Horror Worship

1. And it came to pass in those days in the 4th year of the rule of Antoninus Blair that there went out a PR release to all the media that they should harken unto it.
2. And the message told of the glad tidings that the Madonna was to get married in Scotland.
3. And the wedding was to be held in the castle at Auchtermuchty, which is called Skibo.
4. And all the nation's journalists travelled together to Scotland but unfortunately there was not room in the Holiday Inn and some were forced to sleep in their cars.
5. And they were known as The Stupid Men from the East of London (Wapping).
6. And their names were McHackior, Bazbamingboye and Caspar Gerard from The Telegraph's Peterbore Column.
7. And they carried with them gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Murdoch.
8. And there were Shepherds in the fields watching Sky TV by night (pay as you view).
9. And behold they saw a star – and lo it was Madonna accompanied by her husband to be.
10. And his name was Guy which means "bloke" or "Diamond Geezer".
11. And Guy was taking the Madonna to the land of his birth to register their child with the authorities.
12. And the child's name was Rocco.
13. And so it was that the ancient prophecy was fulfilled. "Madonna will give birth to a boy child, the son of Guy, whose name shall be called Wonderful, Fantastic, Great, Cool, Wicked, Respect *(Cont. Chapter 94)*

(To be read in all churches at Christmas)

The Wedding Of The Century

How They Are Related

Madonna

Don Ciccone
Don Corleone
Madonna Corleone
Leonie Blair
Tony Blair
Madonna e Mobile
Madonna Kebab
MaDonna Summer
Macaroni Ciccone
Captain Corelli's Madonna

(First Cousin Once Removed)

Guy Ritchie

Guy Fawkes
Ritchie The Lionheart
Sir Guy de Guisborne
Sir Guy the Gorilla
Sir Lionel Ritchie
Lionel Bart
Lionel Blair
Tony Blair
Sir Richie Benaud
Sir Cliff Ritchie

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And a Happy Holiday Season to you all!

Like many of you, I have been out in the High Street amidst the bustling crowds as they make their preparations for the Big Day!

But, you know, there's always a small minority, isn't there, who try to ruin everything, with their mindless and thoughtless behaviour!

I'm thinking of what Mr Straw, the co-ordinator of our Neighbourhood Watch, recently described in a memorable phrase coined for him by Mr Campbell as "the yob culture".

We like to think of ourselves as tolerant people. But when we see the office parties spilling out onto the streets from the Britannia Arms, with their beer cans and their foul language, don't we all think it's time we became a lot more intolerant towards this kind of loutishness?

Only the other day, I was talking to one of our local taxi-drivers, who was driving Cherie and myself back from Mr Hinduja's Diwali Party at the St Albion's Trust Forte, and he said, "Vicar, do you know what I would do with these yobs? I'd string them up, because it is the only language they understand."

Strong language perhaps! But you know, my cab driver friend had a point!

It's all very well Cherie going on about human rights. But what about the rights of the ordinary people who are sick and tired of having their lives ruined by drunken, shaven-headed teenagers, who think it's clever to be able to down 14 pints in the course of an evening, and then go round shouting abuse at people like the Vicar.

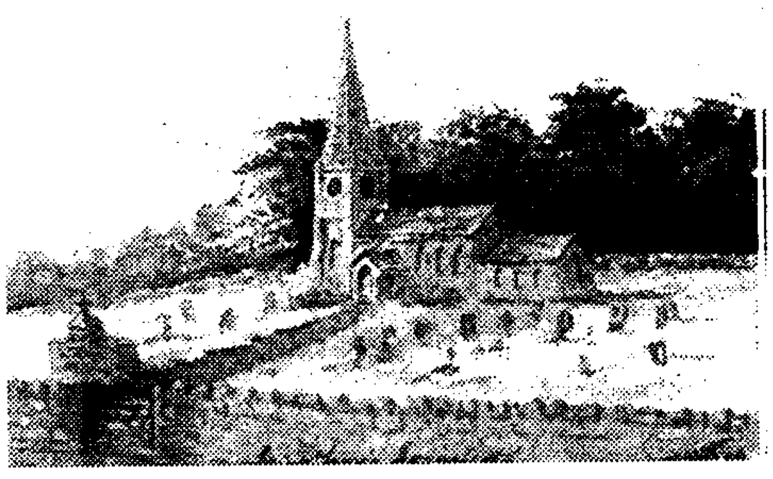
So what it all comes down to, as Mr Straw told us at our recent Neighbourhood Watch Meeting, is that it is now time for action rather than words. Which is why, in the next few weeks, Mr Straw and I will be giving a whole series of talks around the parish, outlining the sort of measures which should be taken to stop these hooligans in their tracks.

The vital thing is that we should all be resolved to take the toughest and most drastic steps to crack down on every kind of criminal behaviour in our parish. And this is no longer something we can just leave to the police, since, for obvious reasons, there are very few of them left on the St Albion's beat.

The truth is that it is up to every one of us to play a part in this one.

We can no longer afford to tolerate what Mr Straw has called, in another memorable phrase, also suggested to him by Mr Campbell, the "walk-on by society".

That is why we need a real crackdown on all those people who believe in the



walk-on-by ethic, which is what allows the yob culture to flourish.

It is the walk-on-by ethic which says "yes" to the lager lout, "yes" to the skinhead, "yes" to the drug pusher and the fox-hunters and all the other criminal elements who try to destroy the very fabric of our communal life here in St Albion's.

That is why I have written a special chorus for this year's St Albion's Carol Service, based loosely on a popular song from the Sixties:

When you see a lager lout
Drunk in the street
Who shouts abuse
Whenever you meet.
Don't walk on by,
Don't walk on by.

If you see a hooligan
After he's had a couple of jars
Wandering down the high street
And breaking into cars,
Don't walk on by.
(But don't have a go either.
Leave it to the police.
Even if there aren't any.)

Words and music T. Blair

Do come along and join in the singing! Mulled wine will be served in the vestry afterwards (one glass only!).

Yours

Tony

Nativity Play

Mrs Jowell writes:

There will be some changes to the traditional format of our Christmas story this year, to reflect the changing patterns of modern society, with particular regard to the family as a much more flexible and multi-faceted grouping.

We have therefore dropped the character of Joseph in the manger scene and replaced him with a female birth-partner, with whom Mary has chosen to share the experience.

The outmoded Holy Family thus becomes a more balanced two-women-and-one-baby unit, which relates more directly to the norms of contemporary society.

Millennium Tent Update

M'aidez, m'aidez, m'aidez from Le Grand Chef Supreme de la Tente Millenniaire, P-Y Gerbil.

Mes amis,

Je suis un grand personage maintenant, merci à tous les supplements et journaux qui a écrit millions de mots au sujet de moi-même, votres truly P-Y G. C'est tout very well pour le Vicaire, Monsieur Tony, de wash his hands de la tente, et pour Milord Falconer de rejecter mon bid pour le "takeover" de la tente, mais c'est moi qui a le support de tous les punteurs qui sont absolument over la lune après having enjoyed un Grand Jour Amazing dans ma tente!

Je veux à tous mes amis One Amazing Jour De Noel!

P-Y Gerbil.

PS. Nous avons maintenant un nouveau exhibit magnifique dans "Le Zone De Gerbil". C'est mon "Scrapbook Millenniaire" avec tous les millions de press cuttings au sujet de moi! Absolument libre à tous les punteurs! Mais vite, vite, vite, il y a seulement trois semaines jusqu'à la dernière Amazing Day!

Hats off to Cherie!

The Vicar's wife proves that big cheques are always in fashion here at St Albion's and she puts poor Mrs Prescott in the shade – which isn't surprising under that hat. *Good for you, Cherie!*

On sale now – SON OF BLAIR – THE SEQUEL £4.99

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Malcom Bradbury

So. Farewell
Then Malcolm Bradbury.
English professor,
Novelist
And author of
TV's *The History Man*.

You were not
David Lodge.

Or were
You?

E.J. Thribb (17½)
– a graduate of Professor Bradbury's creative writing course at the University of East Neasden 1977-1978 where he wrote his first published poem, "So. Farewell then David Lodge"
(Surely shome mishtake? Ed.)

TRAVEL TO MY WORLD.
Male 29, enjoy life as much as possible, likes, mounting, biking, seeks female with similar interest for possible relationship.

Sale & Altrincham Messenger

QUALIFIED NURSEY NURSE
Required at Kenleigh Nursery School, St Annes.

Blackpool Gazette

IN THE COURTS

The Case of Sir Elton Spangle v. Bob Sponge (or it may be the other way round).

Day 94. The case continued before Mr Justice Cocklecarrot, in which popular singer Sir Elton Spangle (real name Reginald Nozzer) is suing his former manager and partner Mr Robert Sponge (real name Robert Sponge) for reasons that have not yet become clear.

Sir Hartley Redface Q.C. *(representing himself)*: We now come to the vexed matter of the 200 boxes of fox-fur underwear which the accused claims that he was given as a Saint Valentine's Day gift by Sir Spangle. Sir Spangle, is it not true that three and a half million pounds is a great deal of money to pay for what are no more than articles of gentleman's underclothing, be they scented with lavender or no?

Sir Elton Spangle: I frequently spend millions of pounds on knickers. But I do not keep a record of how much they actually cost. That's what people like Spongey are for.

Mr Sponge *(interrupting)*: Ooh, Miss High-and-Mighty! Hark at her! And the books weren't all I used to do for Spangles, I can tell you!

Mr Justice Cocklecarrot: You will have your chance, Mr Sponge, to tell us all. In the meantime, perhaps you would be so good as to allow Sir Hartley to continue. When it comes to expensive briefs, I think he is the expert!

(All lawyers collapse in hysterical laughter at this extraordinary example of judicial wit. The court adjourned for luncheon. Following the adjournment, Mr Sponge was recalled to the stand, to be cross-examined by Mr Simon Hugefee Q.C.)

Hugefee: Mr Sponge, I put it to you...

Mr Sponge: I'd rather you didn't!

(Laughter in public gallery)

Hugefee: I am obliged to you. Mr Sponge, Sir Spangle has shown you nothing but kindness and generosity over the many years of your professional and, dare I say it, intimate personal association. I am thinking in particular of his gift to you on 17 October 1997, as a gesture of reconciliation following an altercation between the two of you in Madame Yo-Yo's Pink Pussycat nightclub in St Tropez, of a solid gold toilet seat, encrusted with rubies. Do you remember that occasion, Mr Sponge?

Sir Spangle *(interrupting)*: She can't remember a thing. The silly cow was always pissed, not to mention doped up to the eyeballs.

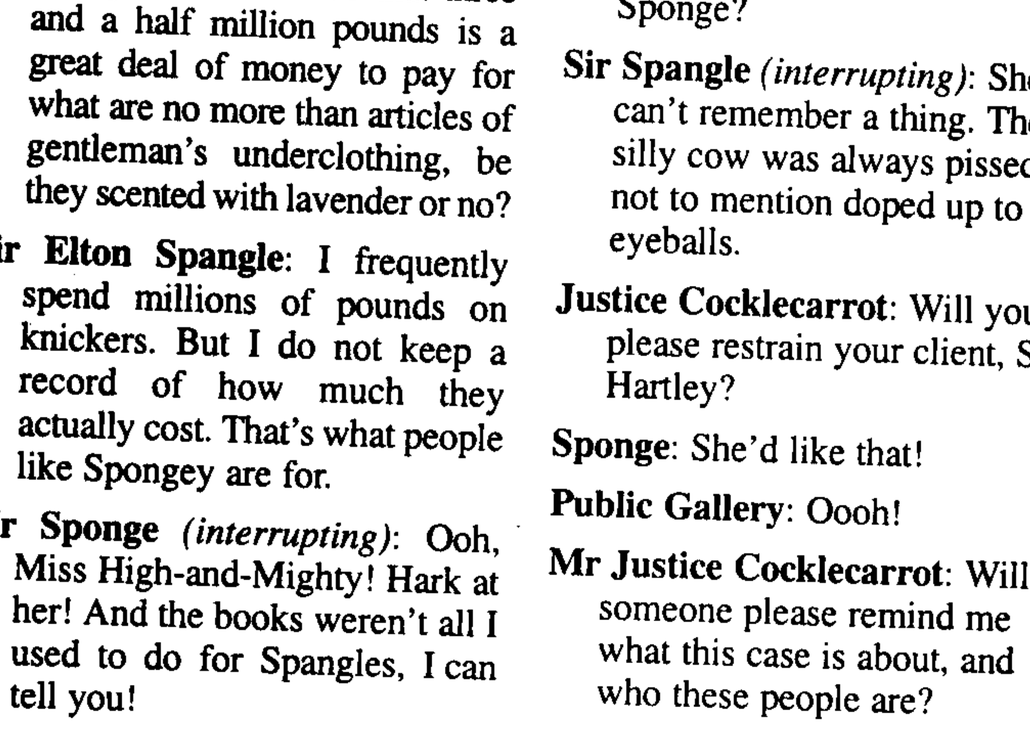
Justice Cocklecarrot: Will you please restrain your client, Sir Hartley?

Sponge: She'd like that!

Public Gallery: Oooh!

Mr Justice Cocklecarrot: Will someone please remind me what this case is about, and who these people are?

The case continues.



The Three Wise-after-the-event Men

This week: Anne Widdecombe

What's the first spoon you can remember?
It was a blue one with a picture of Peter Rabbit on it. I still have it.

Do you have a favourite spoon?
I have a lot of spoons and it is hard to choose between them. But if I did have a favourite, it would probably be the one my Aunt Mildred gave me when I was confirmed.

What kind of spoon is that?
It is a silver sugar spoon with a Union Jack on the handle. It makes me feel proud every time I stir my tea.

How important are spoons in your life?
Oh, very important. I never go anywhere without one. You never know when you might need one.

Are there any spoons you don't like?
What I really hate are those little plastic ones that you get on trains. What sort of image of Britain does that give to foreign visitors?

Do you prefer big spoons or small spoons?
Big ones, obviously! (Laughs)

When did you last buy a spoon? Can you remember?
Yes, indeed. It was last year, in a craft shop in Kendal. It was a wooden spoon, which I use for stirring porridge.

Where do you keep your spoons?
Most of them are in a drawer in my kitchen. I call it my "spoon drawer".

Has anything amusing ever happened to you involving a spoon?
No.

NEXT WEEK: Charlotte Church

© *All newspapers.*

THAT QUEEN'S SPEECH IN FULL

"MY GOVERNMENT will introduce a number of measures designed to persuade the punters to vote Labour next May. Don't worry if you don't like them much, because there won't be time to introduce any of them anyway. The really important one is the Abolition of the Foxhunting Bill. But don't get upset, because that won't get through in time either. Vote Labour and God Save Myself."

PRIVATE EYE

Should The Guardian Be Abolished?

Phil Paperfordays
Royal Staff

TODAY we dare to ask the most important question in the history of Britain. Is it time to abolish the Guardian? Surely this creaking out-moded Victorian institution has outlived its usefulness and has no place in a modern go-ahead Britain. Don't get us wrong. We have nothing against the Guardian. It provides amusement for many people and offers a sort of escapism for those whose lives are lacking meaning. And some actually enjoy the pomp and the spectacle – the traditional sight of Alan Rusbridger making pronouncements on the issues of the day or the lesser members of the Guardian family sounding off on subjects about which they know very little.

Fair enough. But let us be honest for a minute. It really does not *matter* what the Guardian says. It has no power and has become largely irrelevant in today's society.

And then there is the matter of the cost of the Guardian – a staggering 45p a day. There may be a case for supporting the editor as a sort of figurehead but one has to ask whether we should still be paying for all those minor hangers-on given grace and favour columns in the newspaper.

One does not want to name names, but if Princess Polly of Toynbee, Lord Hugo the Young and Dame Julie Bullshit were all thrown out tomorrow nobody would care in the slightest *(cont. on all pages for weeks on end).*

That New Labour Rural White Paper In Full

"Saving England's Green And Pleasant Land"

(HM Stationery Office £75)

FOREWORD by the Rt. Hon. John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, Saviour of the Planet and Secretary of State For Everything

DON'T get me wrong. I've got nothing against the countryside. I saw it once out of the window of one of my Jags. And now I've got the chance to do something about it, after 18 years of Tory neglect and mismanagement. I've been all over the countryside, listening to people. But unfortunately I can't remember anything they said.

However, this Government is determined to save the country side for future generations by turning it into a town.

John Prescott

Details of plan to be announced after next election

Yobs
HUSBAND
Dear Santa. Last Christmas I asked for a mountain bike. You didn't bring me one...
..now. I'm a year older, a year stronger.
.. capable I think of kicking your head in if I don't get one this time.

TORIES DEFEND TAX PAYMENTS

by Our Political Staff **Simon Hefferlump**

THE Conservatives have revealed just exactly how they are able to promise £8 billion in tax cuts combined with no reduction in public services.

"It's because we know we're not going to win, so we'll never have to deliver on it," said a senior Tory *(cont'd. p. 94)*

The Santiago Telegraph
FRIDAY DECEMBER 15 2000

LAMONT AWARD SHAME

by Our Political Staff **DOMINGUEZ LAWTHON**

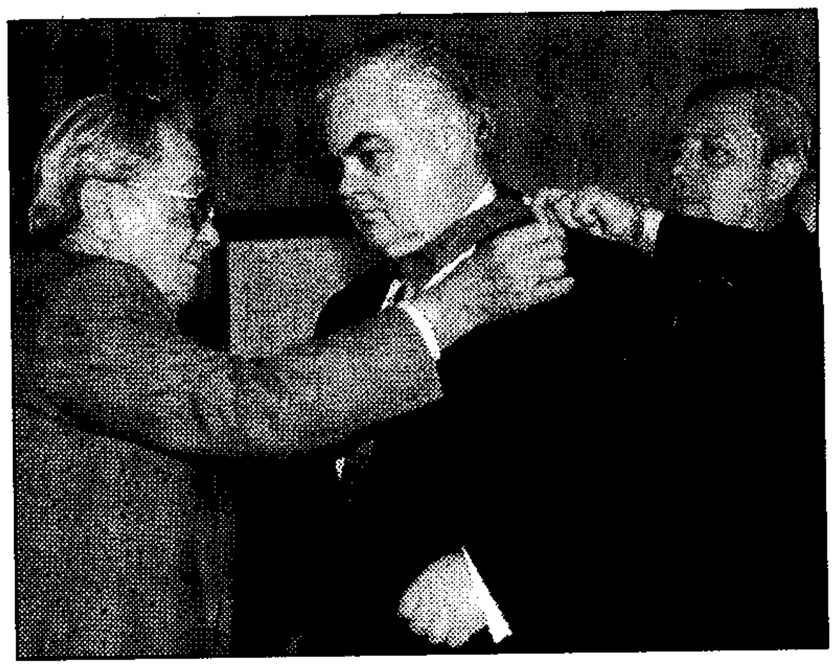
CHILEAN public opin-ion has been outraged by the news that British politician Norman Lamont has been honoured by General Pinochet.

"This is a disgrace," said a spokesman. "We may not like General Pinochet much, but his involvement with an internationally reviled figure like Norman Lamont brings shame to the entire Chilean nation."

He continued, "Lamont was responsible for the disappearance of millions of pounds during the so-called Black Wednesday. He was never brought to trial for his crimes and continued to live a life of luxury visiting Threshers for sherry and cigars and letting out his property to Miss Whiplash and her friends."

THRASHERS

Lady Thatcher, a prominent supporter of Norman Lamont, was however quick to defend him. "Norman is a very sick man and has been for years. He had no idea what he was doing in the nineties and it's unfair to blame him on account of something that happened a long time ago."



Those Labour Legislative Programme Quiz Shows

The Weakest Link
BBC, 5.30pm
TONY BLAIR realises quoting from television game shows is a much easier way to run the country rather than outlining any vision for the future, as he desperately hopes that someone else will be voted off first.

Countdown
Channel 4, 4.00pm
TONY BLAIR works out his Countdown conundrum – how to keep the voters happy for the next six months as the deadline to the May 1st election ticks away.

15-1
Channel 4, 4.00-4.30pm
THE GOVERNMENT's fifteen bills outlined in the Queen's Speech are whittled down, until just one finally makes it onto the statute books before the May 1st deadline.

(That's enough Labour game shows. Ed.)

TOP COMEDIAN LAUNCHES LABOUR CAMPAIGN

by Our Showbiz Correspondent **Victor Meldrew**

THE NATION's grumpiest comedian, Mr Tony Blair, is to try and win support for Labour in the next election.

TV's Tony Blair, best known for his catchphrase "You don't believe me!", is to appear on television with Labour stalwart, Richard Wilson, in a bid to persuade the nation that the Labour Government isn't a joke.

Says Richard Wilson, "I'm delighted that Tony has decided to join the team. He has made us laugh for years and when he said he wanted to help pensioners we all said, 'I don't believe it!'"

Tony Blair, star of TV sitcom *One Foot In The Mouth*, is 49.

There were also improvements in the quality of school leadership at both primary and secondary level. Elizabeth Passmore, the Head of the School Improvement Division at Ofsted, said that in some cases the former failing schools were so successful and popular that they were now oversubscribed.
Grauniad

MALE and female massage available, most areas covered.
Enfield Advertiser

SUCCESSFUL Personal Investing Course. 17 parts, cost over £200, accept £20.
Hereford Times

DOUGLAS ARMS HOTEL • CASTLE DOUGLAS
CHRISTIAN RESOURCE MINISTRIES
invite you to hear
RANDY VICKERS
of Northumberland Centre for Prayer and Christian Healing
speaking on
"Healing in the Authority of Jesus"
Galloway Gazette

ROY of the ROVERS
THE PLAYERS AT MIDDLECHESTER ROVERS ARE DELIGHTED BY THE APPOINTMENT OF THEIR NEW COACH
GOOD NEWS! TEL IS COMING! TO HELP US!
HE'LL GIVE US SOME GREAT TIPS
FILL YER BOOTS! CASH ONLY! DON'T WRITE ANYTHING DOWN!
COME ON YOU READIES!
COOPER

SOAP STAR IN ROYAL WALK ON

by Our TV Staff **Janet Coronation Street Porter**

THE CAST of the nation's longest-running soap opera, The Royal Family, were thrilled yesterday when a member of Coronation Street made a surprise appearance in their show, as part of their 4,000th year celebrations.

"I couldn't believe it," said a delighted Prince Charles. "I turned up for work as normal, but who should be there but Audrey (actress Lyn Nargs). She looked much like she did on television and spoke her one line, 'What do you do?' just like she was one of us."

Multi-Faith Coronation Street

The star's appearance came as a welcome boost to the ailing soap which has begun to run out of story lines after its peak in 1997 when one of its lead characters, the glamorous Diana, was killed off. Viewers were heartbroken at the loss of one of their favourite characters and even left flowers, believing her to be a real person.

The romance between Charles and Camilla failed to capture the public's imagination, but there was a minor revival when the Queen Mother (played by the late Ena Sharples) reached her hundredth year in the show.

Soak Opera

Younger viewers have been wooed by the new glamorous juvenile lead, Prince William, and many have enjoyed the scenes set in exotic Chile.

But one spokesman said, "Audrey's appearance is just what we needed. It's a shot in the arm for us and it's only a pity that she cannot be a regular."

LATE NEWS

Guardian Editor, Alan Rubbisher, has called for Coronation Street to be removed from the schedules and replaced by something "more in keeping with modern Britain".

(Reuters)

STUDENT HAS GAP YEAR

by Our Entire Staff

A STUDENT today sent home some pictures of himself abroad on his gap year. *© All Newspapers.*

ON OTHER PAGES

Those fab William pix 2-94
Riots in Nice 95
Floods cover Britain 96

THE
ATLANTIS TELEGRAPH

FLOODS WORSEN IN WETTEST AUTUMN ON RECORD

by MICHAEL FISH

THE MAYOR of Atlantis dismissed suggestions last night that his city would be under water by Christmas.

Speaking from his makeshift office on top of his roof, the Mayor said that "There is no cause for alarm. The situation is totally under control. We have taken all the necessary precautions and we have glug glug glug glug"

ON OTHER PAGES ● *The Myth of Global Warming by Optimistes 4* ● *Your drains tonight 5* ● *Unfunny bas relief by Nikolos Garlandis*

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING!
HELLO, DARLING! I THINK I'M STILL ON THE TRAIN
SELFRIDGES
GOODBYE CRUEL WORLD
COULD YOU KEEP QUIET! I'M TRYING TO SLEEP!
I LIKE LIVING IN THE FAST LANE
ONLY TEN NICKING DAYS 'TILL CHRISTMAS!
HI!
HOW ARE YOU?
THROUGH THESE MEAN STREETS, A MAN WHO WAS NOT MEAN WAS FORCED TO WALK
BUM
I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE YOU ARE DRUNK- SHOPPING, SIR, BLOW INTO THIS!
BUT YOU'VE ALREADY MUGGED ME! BACK THERE!
FREE EUTHAN-ASIA
I BELIEVE IN SANTA CLAUS, BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE IN WILLIAM HAGUE
GIVE ME ALL YOUR BLEEDIN' MONEY!
AS SOON AS WE CAN GET OUT OF THIS CRUSH I'M LEAVING YOU!
I CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE!
YUC
I CAN-NOT GO ON
COME ON OUT M'NASTY WE KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE!
POLICE
WE FORGOT TO SHOPLIFT ANYTHING FOR AUNTIE, NELLY!
THE END IS NIGH
WE KNOW!
HOW'S MY DRAWING?
SHE'S CRACKIN' FOR IT
LEWD POSTER
PAS TAPS
HEATH

The Cowdrey I Knew

by **W.F. Deedes**

IT WAS in 1892 that I firsht remember sheeing a young shchoolboy in short troushers coming out to bat for Shaint Cakesh in the annual Lords fixture againsht Fettesh. He went in at Number Shixsh, following E.L.B. Jackshon, brother of F.Sh. Jackshon, who of course later captained Yorkshire.

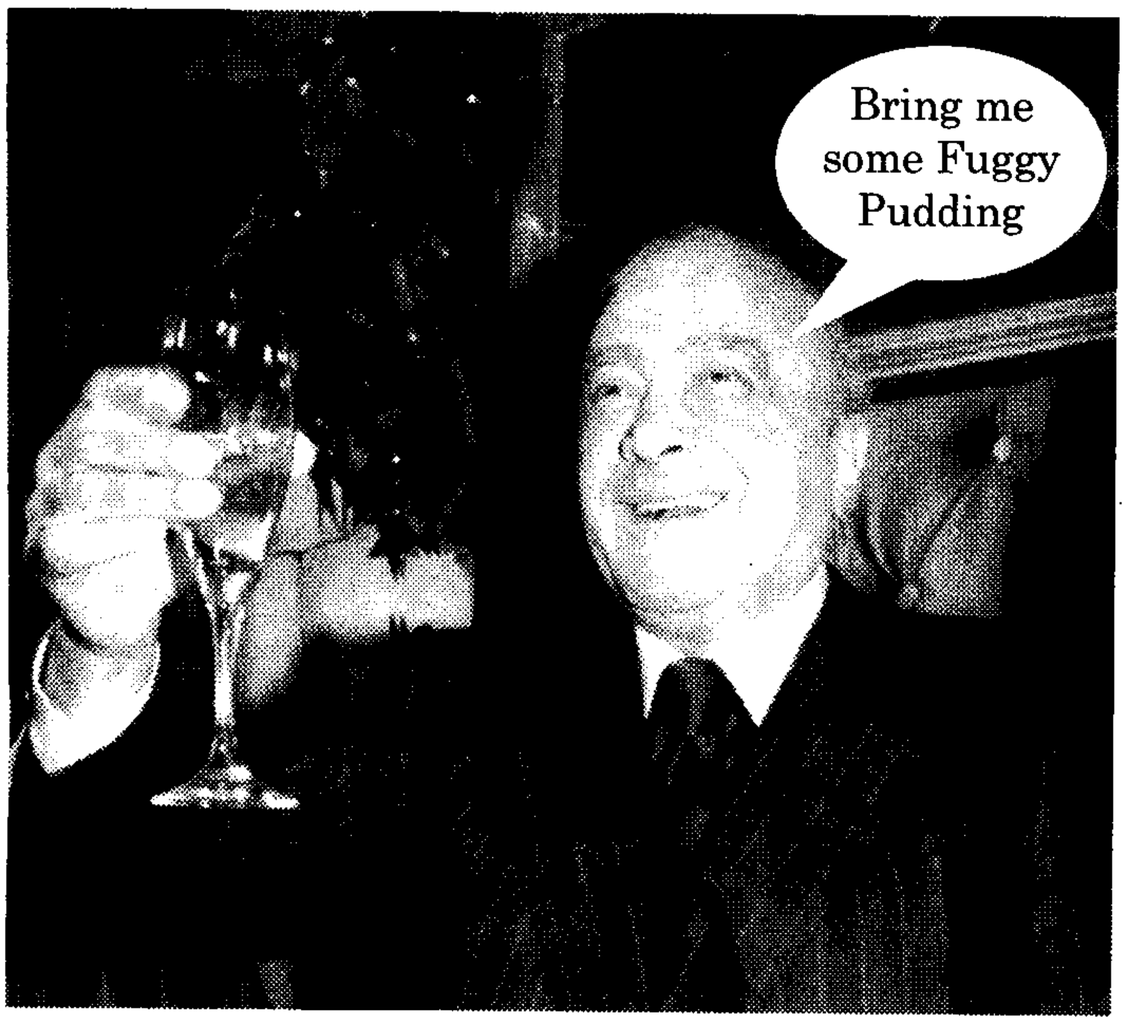
The young 12-year-old Cowdrey wash wholly unabashed by the occashion, and hit an unbeaten 5 not out before rain shtopped play.

Many yearsh later *(cont. p. 94)*

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Listen to me, Nathan. There comes a time when to believe in a God-like figure, who descends to shower you with presents, becomes plain silly.
Mummy! Uncle Jake doesn't believe in Charles Saatchi any more!



STORM GROWS OVER PUBLIC SCHOOL BOOK

by **Harrow Thompson**

THOUSANDS of old boys of the famous public school St Cakes (motto 'Quis donet entrat' – 'Who pays, gets in') have written to the headmaster, Mr Kipling, protesting at a new official history of the school, "2000 Years On", written by Old Cakeian Humphrey Carpenter.

The Old Cakeians, many of them dead, are incensed at the portrayal of the school as a hotbed of "snobbery, sodomy and stupidity".

Said famous old boy Michael Winner, "Of course, a lot of that sort of thing did go on, but Mr Carpenter has no right to dredge it all up."

Harrow and Goodbye

Other famous Old Cakeians include Neil Hamilton, Ernest Saunders, Lord Archer of Weston-Super-Market and Lord Biggs of Rio de Janeiro.

TV Highlights

ITV – Friday 7.30pm

40 Years Of Coronation Street Celebrations

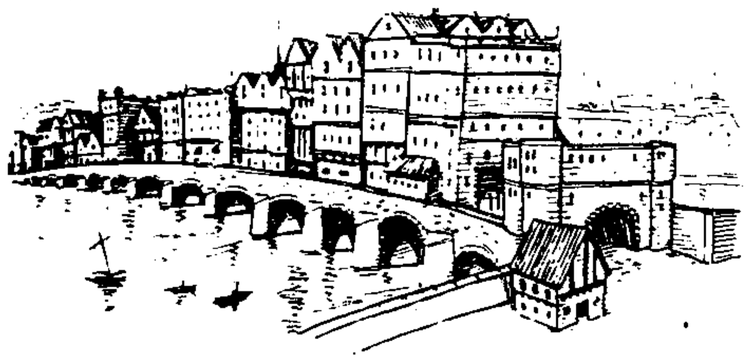
A NOSTALGIC look back at forty years of programmes celebrating Coronation Street anniversary celebrations, including an interview with the man who originally had the bright idea of wall-to-wall celebrations with a sprinkling of C-list celebrities, and a special programme that celebrates the fact they've squeezed a few extra ratings out of clapped-out old-fashioned soap opera.

Apology

IN recent years, in common with other newspapers, we may have given the mistaken impression that the French Government acted disgracefully in unilaterally banning our BSE-contaminated beef imports, and implied that this was behaviour typical of double-crossing garlic-eating continentals like the French.

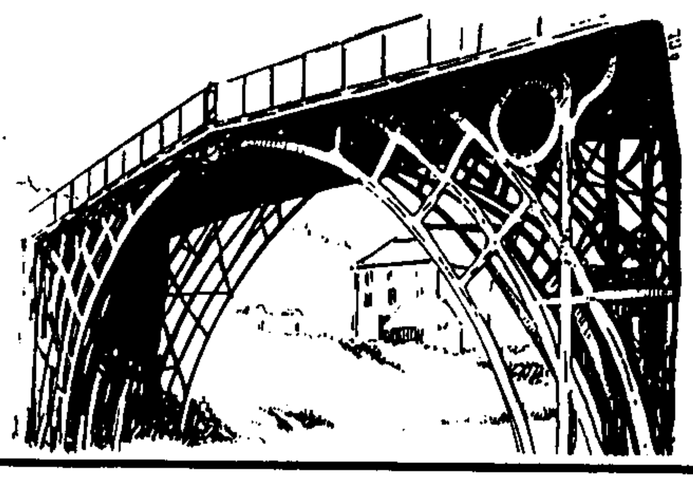
We now realise, in the light of news that French beef is infected with BSE, that nothing could be further from the truth, and we call on our Government to show some true British bulldog spirit and immediately unilaterally ban French beef imports ***(cont. 2094)***

BRITISH BRIDGE BUILDING THROUGH THE AGES



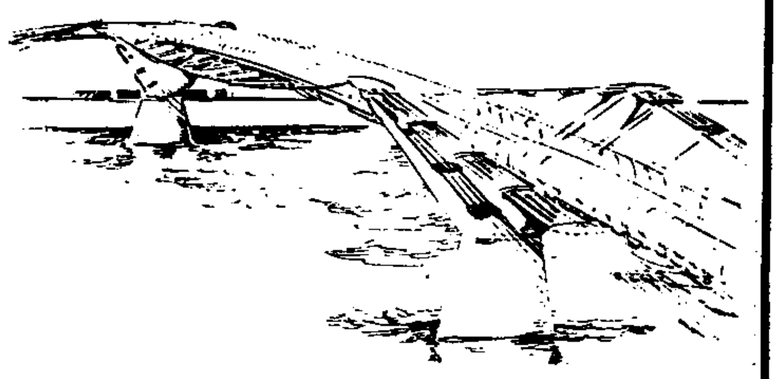
4,900 BC - 1779 AD

British public sees designers make significant advances in the construction of load-bearing arches using masonry. Structures are heavy, with high stiffness and strength.



1779 - 2000

British public sees designers make increasing use of modern materials, producing much lighter structures with the required stiffness and strength.



10 June, 2000

British public sees designers of new bridge haven't the slightest notion of the difference between stiffness and strength.

DIARY

WOODROW WYATT: This morning, I spotted the Lord Almighty across a busy cloud and made a bee-line for him. He seemed delighted to see me – and who wouldn't be, stuck among all those feathery angels, the females flat-chested, the men all raging homos?

"You're doing a first-class job down below," I told him. "Showers galore. Splendid floods. Everyone adores them. You're so clever, you really are."

I can see Him thinking what a shrewd judge of character I must jolly well be. At last, a new boy who knows what's what! He must realise by now that it would be in His best interests to promote me to something a little special, above all those clodhopping commoners. Yes, we Lords must stick together.

This afternoon, I receive a call from St Peter, bless him, to report ASAP to a Mr S. Claus. I sense a prestige appointment in the offing, as befits my status.

ALAN CLARK: I hear tell there's going to be a bit of a Ding-Dong merrily on high. Ra-*ther*! So arrive early, on the look-out for anyone without wings. Alas, could only spot the ghastly bow-tied oily little dwarf Wyatt sucking up to God quite shamelessly in the far corner of the cloud. *We'll have to put a stop to that*, I thought, as I sidled up, managing to catch God's eye over Wyatt's hopelessly dandruffy shoulder.

God and I exchanged knowing glances. I think I detected a smirk on His face as I thrust my index finger in my mouth and performed one of my "sicky" acts. I must see to it that the loathsome Wyatt is kicked downstairs, so that I may replace him. What bliss, to be on that premier cloud, then promoted to God's right hand (possible canonisation in store?), perhaps soon to be honoured with a shrine somewhere halfway decent in the South of France (please *not* the Home Counties) and finally – who knows! – to the heavenly throne itself. After all, one can't help feeling that God is getting a bit long in the tooth. Some of his recent judgements have been positively barking. Might He not feel more comfortable *(hur! hur!)* performing a task a little less, how should one put it, *high profile*?

In the afternoon, the unctuous and grotesquely hirsute St Peter calls, asking me to report to Santa Claus sharpish. Recognition at last!

JAMES LEES-MILNE: Receive a kind invitation from the Lord Almighty (absolute treasure) to luncheon with a Mr Claus. *Not* a name one recognises, no mention in *Burkes Paradise* whatsoever. But I suppose one must keep an open mind as regards *hoi polloi*.

Why on earth does one bother? I dutifully turn up at his Grotto (*très* grot) only to find Wyatt and Clark already there, looking daggers at one another. Both *shameless* social climbers, not to mention *un peu nouveau*. But being a true gentleman, I attempt a few half-hearted civilities.

WOODROW WYATT: Am well in with Claus, who already values my opinions above anyone else's. I tip him the wink that Geoffrey Robinson is a hot tip for taking over Blair's job after Hague wins his landslide at the next election. In turn, he says he wants me to occupy a key position in his entourage as one of his Little Helpers, and honours me with full executive responsibility for mucking out the reindeers. I am well in!

We discuss the distribution of Christmas presents to all the children of the world. "Surely not *all*?" I protest. I advise him it would be far better for everyone if he delivered prezzies to Prince William and Harry, perhaps a handful to Rupert M's delightful children, and perhaps a couple to Mark and Carol, but surely one must draw the line somewhere. In my experience, free Christmas presents only make the lower orders uppitty, causing misery not only to themselves but to others. At that moment, Clark and Lees-Milne drop by and start rummaging for jobs. But Claus is a man of the world; he needs no help from me to sniff out a charlatan and a snob.

JAMES LEES-MILNE: It occurs to me that Santa Claus has more than a drop of German blood in him. He is a mite *de trop*: how one wishes he would call a halt to all that awful yo-ho-hoing. His clothes – blistering red with ungainly white piping – lack both dignity and *élan*. And as for his effort at a beard! One doesn't like to stare, but it is so transparently artificial as to be a social embarrassment.

Presently, he demands I ride in his sleigh (was there ever a form of transport more *vulgar*?) and that I sort out the gifts for what he does insist upon calling "all the lovely little kiddies". *Must* I? Presents for children at Christmas! How one despises these modish opinions. I chance upon a couple of dolls called Ken and Barbie. Might Barbie perchance be one of the Claus Barbies of Lyons? If so, she lets down her illustrious family: to my mind, she is far too brazenly *female* to be of any real interest. Nevertheless I find her "partner" Ken almost *intoxicatingly* attractive, though with precious little "up top" or even, more importantly, "down below" (!).

ALAN CLARK: Claus is a rubbery little shit. He sits back in the sleigh barking orders and grabbing all the limelight – ho fucking ho – while I'm bunged down the chimneys with the stockings, and all for a glass of umpteenth-rate port and a raw sodding carrot. "But my dear Woodrow, *you* should be Father Christmas!" I whisper to the shit Wyatt while Claus isn't listening. "You're so much merrier and more festive than the present incumbent!" Needless to say, the oaf swallows the bait, purring with contentment. Once he has done the dirty work on Claus, with one nifty shove, the sleigh will be mine.

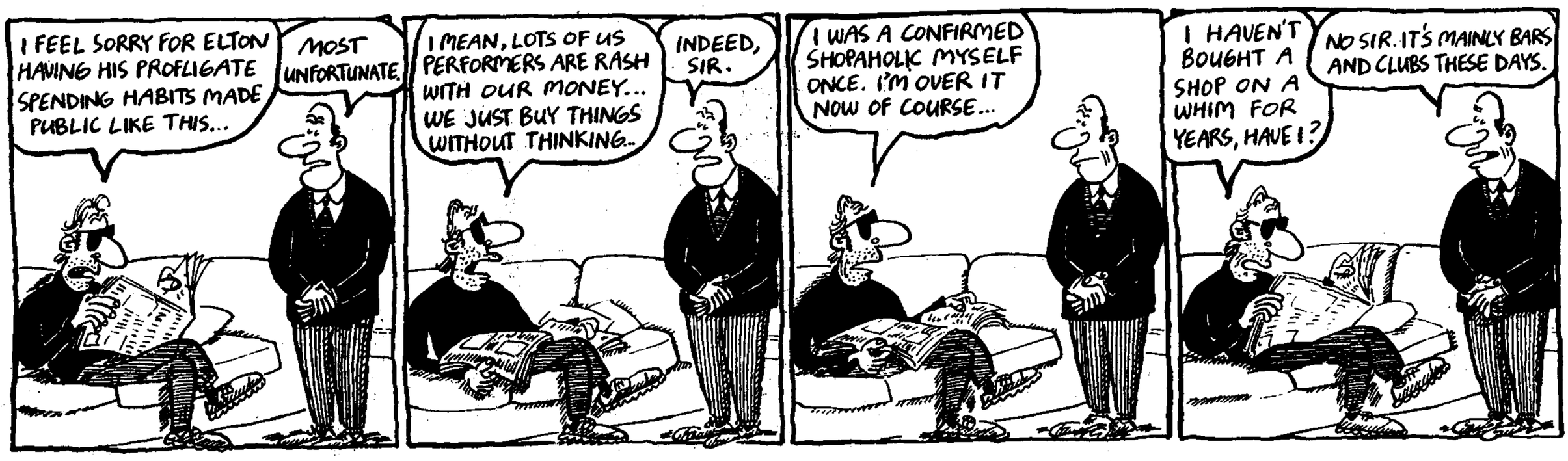
WOODROW WYATT: Clark, it turns out, is in fact a man of sound judgement and vision, an Aitken *de nos jours*. I certainly intend to employ him in some junior capacity in the future.

JAMES LEES-MILNE: *Must* they jingle those bells? And *all* the way? It's bad enough throwing unearned gifts at the great unwashed, but to accompany it with such merriment is really fearfully *déclassé*. We wish you a merry Christmas? *Oh no, we jolly well don't.*

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I FEEL SORRY FOR ELTON HAVING HIS PROFLIGATE SPENDING HABITS MADE PUBLIC LIKE THIS...
MOST UNFORTUNATE.
I MEAN, LOTS OF US PERFORMERS ARE RASH WITH OUR MONEY... WE JUST BUY THINGS WITHOUT THINKING..
INDEED, SIR.
I WAS A CONFIRMED SHOPAHOLIC MYSELF ONCE. I'M OVER IT NOW OF COURSE...
I HAVEN'T BOUGHT A SHOP ON A WHIM FOR YEARS, HAVE I?
NO SIR. IT'S MAINLY BARS AND CLUBS THESE DAYS.

Literary Review

Books Of The Year

Q: WHO are the strongest supporters of the "Books of the Year" supplements in national newspapers? Readers? No. They can't see the point of these endless pages filled with sub-celebrities puffing their friends. Newspaper executives? No. Their idea of arts coverage is pictures of Liz Hurley and interviews with Sir Elton John.

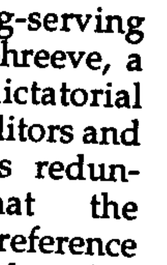
In fact the most fervent advocates of these countless mini-paragraphs in which novelist X descants on the darling productions of his friends Y and Z are literary editors. Their reasoning? Firstly, the astonishing fact that they don't cost anything. Flattered to be asked, the great and the good appear for free. Secondly, books supplements can draw attention to books written by the people who happen to review for them.

Thus in the *Sunday Times* Peter Kemp's fiction best-of includes Terence Blacker's *Kill Your Darlings* and Stephen Amidon's *The New City*. Both Blacker and Amidon are highly accomplished performers, natch, and also regular *Sunday Times* reviewers. Meanwhile in the *Independent* John Walsh also marked out Blacker's *Kill Your Darlings* without mentioning Blacker's status as a regular columnist for the paper. Still, no one's actually ashamed of this partisan approach any more. The *Observer*'s literary editor Robert McCrum actually admitted on Newsnight that he pulled unfavourable reviews of "Friends of the Paper" like Salman Rushdie and didn't mind saying so.

Elsewhere it was a disappointingly well-behaved year. Only two dishonourable mentions. First there was Lord Jenkins' espousal of *Old Friends and Modern Instances* by veteran diplomatic bore and crawler Sir Nicholas Henderson (Profile). "This series of a wide range of pen-portraits is a total pleasure to read," wheezed Woy, his enthusiasm obviously having nothing to do with the fact that one of the chapters is devoted to a glowing portrait of milord Jenkins himself.

Second there was Humphrey Carpenter in the *Sunday Times* for getting the wrong end of the stick. "A book with a low-key title with a refreshing lack of pre-publication hype – and for many it was the novel of the year. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* does for Willesden what *Midnight's Children* did for Bombay..." Can he be serious? Hamish Hamilton paid £200,000 for it, splashed it all over the place, and newspapers have fallen over themselves to profile its photogenic 25-year-old author.

The Private Eye team will be signing copies of:
The Private Eye Annual 2000
Son of Blair – The Sequel
Colemanballs 10
at WATERSTONE'S, Leadenhall Market, EC1 on Thursday 14th December 12.30pm – 2.00pm
and at BOOKS ETC, Piccadilly, W1 on Monday 18th December 12.30pm – 1.30pm
To reserve signed copies contact
WATERSTONES:
Caroline Dickson on 020 7220 7882
BOOKS ETC:
Richard Asplin on 020 7379 7313



Books & Bookmen

■ THE problems affecting Sir Richard Branson's Virgin empire have now reached his book company, Virgin Publishing, in its salubrious offices over the River Café in Hammersmith.

In August the long-serving managing director Rob Shreeve, a notoriously rude and dictatorial figure, made two senior editors and five other staff members redundant, announcing that the company's future lay in "reference publishing". The next day the reference editor resigned.

Having done Branson's dirty work (and published his autobiography, *Losing My Virginity*), Shreeve himself left soon afterwards. Publishing chairman Robert Devereux, Beardie's former brother-in-law, then touted the company for sale but found no takers for Virgin's largely trashy, cheap'n'cheerful illustrated frontlist. Before long he too had abandoned the sinking ship.

Beardie then appointed as Virgin Publishing's new md the international rights director "K.T." Forster. She immediately closed down the travel publishing department, with the loss of a further eight jobs and freelance contracts.

There has been another spate of high-level resignations, including the publicity and marketing managers within a week of each other. The cash-strapped company is now renting out half its office space, and the staff head-count is down to 29 from more than 50 four months ago. Industry insiders give the firm six months at most before it emulates one of Beardie's ill-fated hot-air balloons.

■ MUCH mirth following the inclusion in Metro's autumn 2000 catalogue of *The Incompetent Manager – Management Failure: Causes, Consequences and Cures* by Adrian Furnham and Robert Hogan.

The book will not now appear next January, the authors having withdrawn from their contract due to the incompetence of Metro md Susanne McDadd and finance director Charles Lumsden when it came to paying the advance.

■ THOUGH invitations to the *Grauniad*'s First Book Award were issued in the name of editor Alan Rusbridger, with the Harry Potter lookalike officiating at the prizegiving, it seems his involvement was somewhat half-hearted. Judging meetings, chaired by comedian turned novelist David Baddiel, took place without Rubbisher. Could Rubbisher's desire to distance himself from Baddiel have anything to do with the *Graun*'s recent out-of-court settlement with Baddiel over a bilious review of his novel, *Whatever Love Means* penned by Julie Burchill? Surely not!

'Bookworm'

QUITE CHARMING, LITTLE GIRL. HAVE A POUND!
AWAY IN A MANGER
CAROLS
SNIPCOCK & TWEED
STUFF THAT - I WANT 500 GRAND FOR MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY!
CHARLOTTE CHURCH BOOK DEAL
SNIPC & TWEE

Pseuds Corner

One could say that White composed his innings in two contrasting styles. That first hour was pure Mendelssohn, all sparkling melody with many agreeable surprises, as when he bounded out of his crease to drive Shahid Afridi over long-off for a mighty six. Between lunch and stumps it was more like Bruckner: solemn tread, with violent interludes. But the Austrian peasant would have won more tests than the Leipzig Bobby-dazzler, and there was sense in White's shift of mood.

MICHAEL HENDERSON
Daily Telegraph

LIMER: Nigel and Denise are delighted to announce the astral nascent and return to familiar consciousness of their daughter Keziah Ephramy Scarlet in a luminous portion of time; 9th November 2000.

Birth announcement
Buxton Advertiser

The logo is made up of two elements, one being seen as the 'M' and the other text MONAHANS. Unlike a more formal 'M', our 'M' is composed of a vivid, natural stroke showing growth, energy and representing the rural location of the firm by also looking like two hills, or representing the Wiltshire Downs as we saw it. This 'M' signposts the company as offering a bespoke service and of being forward looking.

The text MONAHANS is designed as a smart formal navy blue classical font – in capitals designed to complement the forward thinking 'M' and show the established, trustworthy, experienced side to Monahans.

'A Message from Owl Graphics'
Monahans Chartered Accountants newsletter

And finally, I should add that the above-mentioned context is by no means the sole preserve of film schools, specialised journals and jargon-riddled monographs. Yes, I myself happen to be a professional critic, but my film-buff friends, who are not, share almost all of these assumptions with me. It would be an insult to their own erudition if, in conversation, I sought to explain them who Murnau was; why Dovzhenko's cinema was revolutionary; exactly for what reason Hawks was prompted to make *Rio Bravo* after seeing *High Noon*; how Godard transformed what might be termed the cinema's interface; why Fassbinder's films have endured while the contemporaneous work of Schlondorff is neglected; and how it is that Lewis's *Gun Crazy*, ostensibly a Poverty Row potboiler, contrives to be one of Hollywood's numerous maverick masterpieces. Nor would I have to spell out the fact that I'm alluding to *FW* Murnau, *Alexander* Dovzhenko, *Jean-Luc* Godard or even *Joseph* H. Lewis. They are as conversant with these names as I myself am.

GILBERT ADAIR
Independent on Sunday

Last, I have been leafing through the magazine *Wallpaper* (£3.50), which is considerably more entertaining than most contemporary novels. It is a utopian document, a style sheet for a world of beauty and elegance.

ALAIN DE BOTON's
bedside table
Sunday Times

CONTRIBUTORS: Marcus Davison, Steve Barrett, Keith Sellick, Michele Hutchison, Robert Long.

£10 paid for entries

IN THE BACK

YORKSHIRE BITTER

POLICE are examining evidence of a huge scam in which thousands of old and sick former coal miners have been ripped off by an organisation supposedly set up to help them claim compensation for crippling industrial diseases.

The so-called Yorkshire Compensation Recovery Service was set up in 1996 by National Union of Mineworkers official David Murdoch to take advantage of a government scheme to allow disability payments to be made to former miners suffering from diseases such as vibration white finger and emphysema.

Clients, often wrongly believing that the YCRS was backed by the NUM, were charged an initial £43 for a "consultation" and £1.50 a week thereafter until their claims were settled. One retired miner paid £300 to YCRS out of his total compensation of £600. Another paid £1.50 a week for three years. The NUM itself offers advice on compensation claims and only charges a nominal administration fee. More than 2,000 ex-miners in South Yorkshire subscribed to YCRS, netting Murdoch and his cronies some £300,000 a year.

It is not, in fact, illegal to fleece the old and the sick in this way. Inspector Knacker's interest has been aroused by the circumstances in which the YCRS was set up in 1996. Murdoch, a former Doncaster councillor and chair of the local Labour Party, has very good contacts on Doncaster council. He is a close friend of Doncaster North MP Kevin Hughes. His cronies on the Mining Community Group ran the council throughout the 80s and most of the 90s.

After taking advice from old NUM contacts in the north-east who had already made millions from similar schemes, he established the YCRS and applied for "start-up" cash from Doncaster council. A report went to the council's policy and resources committee on 24 June 1996. It says "an inaugural meeting took place on 4 January 1996 outlining the aims and objects of the organisation."

According to minutes of that meeting provided by YCRS, those in attendance included, most usefully, Peter Welsh, the then leader of the council, as well as two other councillors, Keith Martin and Danny Buckley. YCRS's board of trustees included Martin and Buckley and a man called Gerry O'Donnell. Also present at the meeting were K. Lumsden and J. Bull — who happen to be Murdoch's daughters. Also named as present at the meeting were Harry Windsor, Mal Woodrow and Steven Guy. YCRS described itself as a voluntary organisation seeking only to maximise income to old miners from disability and related payments.

The council duly granted it £100,000. There was also a free flow of manpower and resources from the council to YCRS, including John Murdoch, son of Dave. Lumsden and Bull were also employed by YCRS.

The NUM smelled a rat when it started to receive complaints from dissatisfied customers who had been misled into thinking Murdoch was representing the union. Further investigation into the minutes of the "inaugural meeting" discovered that one of the "trustees", Gerry O'Donnell, never attended any meeting and had no idea that he had been appointed a trustee.

Buckley, Windsor and Woodrow also deny attendance. A social worker in Edinburgh, a Mr J. Dunlop, has complained that he left the organisation after a few weeks because it was operating a system that encouraged fraudulent claims. YCRS is not a registered company, has filed no accounts and is not registered for VAT.

Strangely, local MP Kevin Hughes has not so far felt the need to warn his constituents over the antics of his old mate, Murdoch.

PENSIONS: ANOTHER (JOHN) MAJOR SCANDAL

UNTIL recently the *Eye* was content to call the pensions mis-selling of the late 1980s, which was set in motion by Norman Fowler and John Major, the most scandalous swindle of the age. But that outstanding achievement has been surpassed by another pensions scandal: something called "inherited Serps", for which the culprits-in-chief are, er, Norman Fowler and John Major.

Both scandals derive from the social security act 1986, piloted through parliament by the then secretary of state for social services, Norman Fowler, and his then parliamentary under secretary whom he promoted to minister of state, John Major.

The pensions part of the act had been inspired by Mrs Thatcher's favourite think tank, the Centre for Policy Studies. The plan was in two parts: to smash the basic state pension, especially the scheme to relate pensions to earnings (Serps), which had been brought in by Barbara Castle when she was Labour's secretary of state in 1975; and, secondly, to bully or bribe people out of state and occupational schemes into private pensions which could be provided at a profit by companies which supported and financed the Centre for Policy Studies.

The privatisation of pensions and its inevitable sequel – the swindling of millions by agents of the private pension firms – has been well covered. But now comes the Serps story. Fowler, Major and Co decided in 1985 that a good way to cut down on state pensions was to halve the amount pensioners could pass on to their spouses. Under Barbara Castle's plan, any pension paid under Serps could be passed on in full, when the pensioner died, to his or spouse.

Major and Fowler decided to halve that sum, but to soften the blow by waiting 14 years so that pensioners had plenty of time to plan for the loss. Everyone agreed that during those 14 years the full range of department of social security skills would be devoted to the maximum publicity for the change. Minister of state John Major was especially forceful on this. "We have every intention," he trumpeted during the committee stage of the bill, "of mounting a major publicity campaign to herald the major changes in the bill".

Sure enough a leaflet was prepared, signed by Fowler, which did warn that in the year 2000 pensioners' spouses would lose half their money. But it was quickly overtaken by another official circular repeating the false story that spouses would inherit the whole lot. For 14 years, while John Major climbed to the top of the ministerial ladder and Norman Fowler became a millionaire and chairman of the Tory party, no one corrected this rather obvious mistake. The law said the spouses' share would be halved. The information from the DSS said it would not.

Shocked by the extent of the mess, Alistair Darling, Labour's social services secretary, has decided to postpone for at least 10 years the date at which the spouse's share would be halved. The total cost of the scheme, including the changes, will be £8bn over 10 years and £12bn over 50 years, a greater expense, this time to the taxpayer, even than the mis-selling scandal.

Darling's concessions were universally welcomed in the House of Commons, and hardly anyone noticed that he was accepting the principle that pensioners' spouses should lose out on Serps – a principle which was bitterly contested when Labour was in opposition.

Who is responsible for this crass and colossal blunder? The Commons select committee on public administration launched an investigation to find out. Alistair Darling (who was not in charge of pensions at the time) thought that the man to take the blame was the minister in charge of pensions at the time. But the minister in charge of pensions at the time, Norman Fowler, didn't agree. He thought the people to take the blame were the civil servants. The civil servants didn't agree. They complained that they shouldn't even have been called to give evidence to the select committee. Throughout all the fuss the man who had promised a publicity campaign to herald the changes but had not produced a single word of publicity about this rather important change, John Major, said nothing at all.

ROLL OF DISHONOUR

THE World Bank prides itself on its commitment to business and private enterprise, but it is finding its close association with rich individuals and companies increasingly awkward.

The World Bank's website lists individuals and firms which are "ineligible" for any contract financed by the bank "because they were found to have violated the fraud and corruption provisions" of the bank's guidelines.

From March to October last year there were 13 on this blacklist; but in a single month at the start of this year the figure rose threefold to 39. The vast majority of these – 28 – are in the United Kingdom. These include two individuals and no fewer than 26 firms registered in London or the Isle of Man. They are: Agricultural Development Services Ltd; Air Exports Ltd; Consultants for International Development PLC; Cord Construction Ltd; Cybertek International Ltd; Economic Consulting Group; Engineering Projects International; First Fuji Ltd; Flair Developments Ltd; Infotek & Co; International Development Projects Services; Inter-Russ Ltd; Medirite Group Ltd; Mima International; Norsk-Agro; Resource Development; Ribalco International; Sharda Impex (UK) Ltd; Shivind Ltd; Thrust Technologies & Co; Times International & Co; United Basel Ltd; West End Associates Ltd; Agric-Canada; and Overseas Project Services Ltd.

MARCHIONESS: The unanswered questions

NO ONE, and certainly not the coroner responsible, has given a credible explanation why the hands were hacked off so many victims of the Marchioness tragedy. So here's a story that might help.

Soon after the news broke of the sinking, both press officers of the London Gay and Lesbian switchboard were phoned by reporters claiming to represent the *Sun* and the *Mirror*. They announced enthusiastically that "a lot of gays were dead" and asked a) whether the Marchioness that evening was on a fundraising exercise for the London Gay and Lesbian switchboard; and b) whether a lot of people on board were HIV positive.

After much telephoning the press officers discovered that the answer to the first question was no, while the answer to the second was "don't know – and we wouldn't answer even if we did". The hacks slunk off, but the next morning the switchboard was deluged with more press inquiries about the number of gays on board.

They were also asked to comment on the suggestion that the police had refused to handle any of the bodies in the water until issued with protective masks and gloves "in case they caught Aids" and that the hands of the bodies were removed because officials in the coroner's office didn't want to run any risks of infection from HIV. Once again, the answers were "don't know".

Eleven years later it seems the questions are at last being asked again – but not yet answered.

GLANDS OFF!

SEARCH through all 16 volumes of the Phillips report on BSE and you will find endless discussion about which civil servants, vets and scientists were to blame for which mistakes at what time. But you will find no definite answer to the rather important question of what caused the new variant CJD in humans which still poses such a grim threat to the lives of so many people.

Most official sources are still floundering around wondering which part of which cows set off the disease. They all start from the theory that new variant CJD is an infectious disease caught by eating infected meat. A rather different view is favoured by a small minority of doctors and scientists. Some of these have been in touch with the *Eye* to suggest that new variant CJD is not infectious at all, but an inflammatory or allergic reaction to brain tissue that finds its way into the human body.

They point to the old forms of CJD, not connected to meat or cattle. In a large proportion of such cases, the cause of the disease has been proved. For instance, in the 1960s, 70s and 80s American drug companies developed the rather disturbing practice of paying morticians and their assistants for pituitary glands ripped out of corpses.

Fred Foreman, a former mortician at Fazakerly Hospital in Liverpool, told the *Eye* that he had supplied large quantities of these glands having removed them at random from corpses in his mortuary. There was, he emphasises, no consent given by any of the families of the dead, from whom he cut the glands after breaking open their skulls.

The glands were bottled in jars and delivered to Liverpool University whence they were flogged off to the United States. He himself said he did not get any money, but the department of health admitted last summer that morticians were paid about 20p per gland. Mr Foreman mentioned two big American drug companies who were engaged in this trade: Upjohn and Pfizer.

The practice of ripping out the tiny pituitary glands from under the brains of corpses was made legal by the human tissue act of 1961. The glands were used to manufacture drugs for "growth hormone" treatment for children and young people of stunted growth and to improve women's fertility.

The treatments were greeted with much rejoicing by patients and doctors until 1985, when a death from CJD in America was attributed to a growth hormone drug manufactured from pituitary glands and injected. Such drugs were instantly banned and replaced by synthetic substitutes. To some extent, however, the damage had been done. Between 1960 and 1983 almost 2,000 children got hormone growth treatment based on the time-honoured practice of corpse-robbing.

From 1994 onwards there were reports from all over the world of CJD deaths directly attributable to growth hormone or fertility treatment. An ITN report from Australia in 1994 revealed the deaths from CJD of four women who had been injected with a fertility drug manufactured from pituitary glands removed from corpses.

An official Australian report earlier this year from Professor Margaret Allen found that the doctors and officials who carried out the corpse-robbing and the injections had broken state and federal law. The doctors, she concluded, had "stretched guidelines, breached ethics and condoned the often illegal harvesting of glands from human bodies to extract human growth hormone and a human pituitary gonadotrophin for infertile adults".

Dr Carmen Lawrence, the Australian health minister, decided that despite the "moral culpability" of the doctors, no disciplinary action would be taken against them. Compensation of £4.4m was shelled out to the CJD victims.

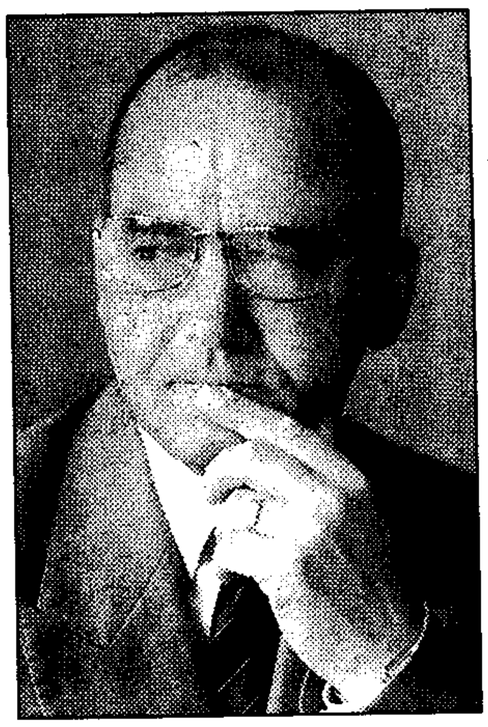
In September 1996 the American journal *Neurology* disclosed 34 CJD cases among growth hormone treatment patients in France. In Britain, also in 1996, James Bettinson, who had grown tall enough thanks to hormone growth treatment to get into the brigade of guards, died from CJD. Two other young people, Donald Spear and Heather Caulton, also died from CJD after growth hormone treatment.

That same year lawyers representing 100 bereaved families of people who had died in the same away sued the department of health alleging negligence over their involvement in growth hormone treatment which resulted in CJD. Mr Justice Morland found that the department of health had indeed been negligent in cases where at least half the treatment was applied after the dangers of hormone growth treatment became known in July 1977.

The vast majority of plaintiffs qualified under this test. To date £4.6m compensation has been paid out to 27 families, and compensation will continue to be paid out for people who died from CJD after hormone growth or fertility treatment involving the use of human pituitary glands.

The deaths continue. Last year six more people died from CJD in circumstances which entitled them to compensation. In February this year the *Guardian* reported the death from CJD of Rachel Gwilliam, 33, who had had growth hormone treatment.

So far 34 British people have died from CJD after receiving hormone growth treatment using pituitary glands. No one knows how many women on fertility treatment suffered the same fate. Indeed the whole glands robbery scandal has had precious little publicity here.



Fred Foreman: Deadly revelations

In July the *Liverpool Echo*, which has followed the harrowing story of organs removed without parents' consent from children at Alder Hey hospital, led the paper with the headline SCANDAL OF STOLEN BRAIN PARTS, in which Fred Foreman's story was spelled out in some detail. Otherwise, outside medical journals and the odd brief report of a death, the silence has been profound. Nor is this story over yet. The report in *Neurology* mentioned above reveals that incubation times in these cases "can be as long as 30 years".

The fact that injected drugs have already caused so many cases of ordinary CJD should surely provide some clue to the cause of new variant CJD which, unlike ordinary CJD, is linked to cows. Norman Baker, Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes, continues his campaign to find out more about possible connections between injected medicines and new variant CJD. On 17 November a letter to him from Yvette Cooper, parliamentary under secretary at the department of health, answers another volley of his questions as follows:

1 Vaccines made with the help of bovine material were not withdrawn when the BSE crisis was exposed in 1989. Indeed, vaccines made with the help of old, possibly infected cattle stock went on being injected into children for at least three years before they were withdrawn. The reason, writes Ms Cooper, is that if the vaccines had been withdrawn earlier "there were no replacement stocks available".

2 Stocks of surgical catgut sutures made from cattle intestine went on being used in British hospitals for at least a year after the BSE epidemic was exposed. The stocks of possibly infected sutures were not withdrawn. The reason was familiar. If stocks had been withdrawn, according to Ms Cooper, "there would have been a severe shortage".

WHISTLING IN THE WIND?

THE national assembly for Wales has said it will hold a limited inquiry into the case of Anna-Marie Davies, the severely disabled child at the centre of a Swansea special school's "do not resuscitate" controversy (see *Eyes passim*).

The move is no more than a partial victory for Anna-Marie's grandparents and carers who wanted a full independent public inquiry into events at the Ysgol Crug Glas school. As *Eye* readers will recall, they only learned of the decision to deny Anna-Marie normal life-saving treatment from whistle-blowing nurse Bunny Pinnington, who was promptly sacked for her troubles.

As the inquiry is to be general in scope, those at the school and within the local education authority who were responsible for deciding Anna-Marie's fate – without consulting her family or her hospital consultant – will not have to explain themselves. Nor will those who sacked Nurse Pinnington for alerting the Davies family that should Anna-Marie, now six, stop breathing at school, her care plan said mouth-to-mouth resuscitation should be delayed for two-and-a-half minutes.

While assembly ministers have decided that Nurse Pinnington acted "quickly, successfully, and in specific instances with clear professionalism to ensure practice and procedure were put in a proper footing", her sacking fell outside their responsibility. They also seem to have concluded – contrary to the findings of a high court judge – that Anna-Marie was *not* the subject of a deliberate do-not resuscitate policy. There was merely "confusion" about resuscitation and her care plan was "open to misinterpretation".

While Anna-Marie's grandparents have written to the assembly to express their fury at all this, Nurse Pinnington is still waiting for a date for her appeal against dismissal under new whistleblowers' legislation.

Smash 'n' Grabbey National

STUNG by a recent Commons attack which condemned mortgage lenders for using "unacceptable tactics" to pursue people whose homes were repossessed in the last recession, Abbey National chairman Lord Tugendhat felt moved to outline the Grabbey's new caring, sharing policy towards its "debtors".

In a letter to Portsmouth MP Mike Hancock, who had publicly lambasted the building society turned bank, Tugendhat claimed that since October the Grabbey had put in place a number of changes to ensure "fair and sympathetic treatment".

For example, there was now a helpline; a commitment to reduce debt by up to 50 percent for those who entered into negotiations with the lender; a promise not to pursue people for alleged debts which are more than six years old; a promise to provide proof of debt and to consider the borrower's current financial situation, etc, etc.

Abbey has also been circulating details of its sympathetic new policy to those who got into mortgage arrears and unwittingly handed over their keys and property years ago in what they thought was a settlement with the lender. One such recipient was Ms X, whom the Grabbey is now chasing for £33,000 nearly six years after it repossessed her two-bedroomed house in Bedfordshire.

A few days later a second letter from Grabbey's solicitors arrived at Ms X's workplace giving her seven days to meet the full debt or face "full court proceedings". So much for Tugendhat's assurances...

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

CORPORATE governance will get a severe test this week with the expected arrival of the report of the investigation into the "never spare the shareholders" regime of former Tomkins dictator Gerg Hutchings. The report was commissioned from accountants Ernst & Young by new chairman David Newlands after Hutchings was forced out in October.

The test will be the extent to which Newlands, himself a Hutchings appointee and silent member of the audit and remuneration committees which should have spotted and stopped the abuses (wives, housekeepers, planes, apartments, charity donations, foreign trips – all on the company tab), makes public the findings. Beyond that is the extent to which it can be seen that E&Y accountants have not spared those who appointed them rather than merely concentrating on the dear departed – Hutchings and his partner in abuse, former finance chief Ian Duncan.

As the entire board was fashioned after Hutchings' "my way or the highway" policy, it is very hard to see how a truly independent investigation (not that Newlands planned to have one of those by appointing Tomkins' accommodating auditors Arthur Andersen until the *Eye* highlighted just how compromised they were by multi-million fees doled out by Hutchings) can exonerate the present Tomkins board or Andersens.

All the non-executive directors, other than former banker Sir Brian Pitman, are hopelessly compromised by their long-term ignorance, amnesia and/or failure to act. The Hutchings clones who make up the executives would find it hard to deny any knowledge of what Greg and Ian were up to all those years. That is particularly so of company secretary Richard Marchant, who handled not just the administration but liaison with the auditors and the Inland Revenue.

What sorely-tried Tomkins shareholders want to see is who knew what and when, and why they did nothing. Four executive jets are somewhat difficult to hide – especially as their cost was in the millions. Similarly, two company-owned apartments in Belgravia and by the Thames. Yet Newlands claims he never knew any of this until angry shareholders brought it to his notice in the summer. What do the board minutes say about these purchases? What do the P11D forms produced by the company for the Revenue say about the use of these assets by Hutchings, Duncan and others?

The hiring of Hutchings' and Duncan's wives by Tomkins is said to have been approved by former chairman Michael Moore years ago. But how was that worth up to £30,000 a year to the shareholders, as distinct to Hutchings and Duncan who did not presumably have to dip into their own pockets to support their wives in the style to which Tomkins had made them accustomed? The excuse is that the payment was for attending company functions and instead of a dress allowance! That's a lot of functions and some wardrobe.

What E&Y and Marchant must answer is why this tasty perk was never disclosed in the annual reports as a somewhat "related" transaction as surely required by company law. If it was listed on the Hutchings and Duncan P11D returns, the omission smacks of deliberate non-disclosure. No doubt it was merely accidental that the payments made to both women for more than 12 years allowed them to use up tax allowances which might otherwise have been wasted.

Who if anyone approved the Hutchings housekeeper being paid by Tomkins – presumably because Mrs Hutchings was so busy on the company's behalf that it was only fair that she should have her home help paid by the company, or maybe it was to ensure Greg could work at home in comfort – is another question Marchant and others have to answer.

Hutchings appears to claim that everything was approved by somebody – Moore, Duncan or the board generally. But if his non-executive rubber stamps Ali Wambold and Roger Holland were ignorant – as Wambold at least claims – who did know? And if these matters were disclosed to the Revenue, were they also disclosed to the auditors? If so, why did Andersens not force their disclosure to shareholders? If not, on whose instructions were the auditors kept in the dark?

Appointing more non-executive directors, which is suggested to be on the way, may allow Wambold and Holland to fall on their Mont Blancs and resign. But others should also go as either too stupid or too culpable to continue to serve – Newlands, Marchant and Arthur Andersen for a start.

But the E&Y report may not mark the end of the scandal. There are rumours that at least one of the three executives suspended last month is claiming to possess more damaging information about the Hutchings era which he will reveal unless treated fairly.

Furthermore it is suggested that former Tomkins executives at bakers Ranks Hovis McDougall, spun off by Hutchings last year, have recently been compensated for losing out on a share scheme designed to reward loyalty. The 1997 plan encouraged executives to buy shares at the then price of over 250p to be held in trust on the promise of receiving free shares in seven years. The scheme ended for the RHM execs when the company was sold. But it seems that after remonstrating with their former colleagues, certain of the unlucky losers have been compensated for the fact that their shares are now below 150p. Doubtless Tomkins shareholders will approve.

INVESTIGATORS from the Department of Timidity & Inaction have finally got round to interviewing the key players in the City Slickers scandal – disgraced Slickers Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell, as well as Mirror editor Piers Morgan. All of which suggests that after the holidays the DTI will finally decide who is to be on the sheet for any prosecution.

Naturally those involved say all is fine, their explanations were accepted and it is business as usual. "Moron" will carry on editing while Bhoyrul is said to be expecting a new year comeback at the *Daily Star* where clearly ripping off readers and abusing their trust is seen as no problem.

Both the *Mirror* and the *Daily Star* may find that their confidence that nothing will happen to embarrass them is misplaced. The issue for Bhoyrul and Hipwell is to decide how to frame the charges. Their only hope is that the DTI lawyers – as they so often do – conclude that it is all too difficult and that using a newspaper to boost the prices of shares you own is not an offence. Insider-dealing it may not be, but what about market manipulation or some similar breach of the financial services act?

"Ah... Mr and Mrs Melrose... glad you both could come in. You had a high risk investment option, so we decided to put all your pension fund on Wayward Dancer in the 3.30 at Sandown. It lost unfortunately – very sorry about that – so goodbye and can you find your own way out..."

Given the message that no prosecution of the morally bankrupt and terminally dishonest Bhoyrul and Hipwell would send – even though financial hacks are expected to be brought within the market abuse rules of the new financial services legislation – it would be hard to justify letting them live to sin again even if Hipwell is said to be ill and Bhoyrul is said to have realised the error of his ways. Well that's what it says in a putative explanation by the *Daily Star* as to why it is hiring such a crook.

With "Moron" the decision is more one of the will to prosecute – something where the DTI has all too frequently been found wanting. Investigators have probed several of his share deals other than the £20,000 purchase of Viglen Technology the day before the Slickers' tipped the company. They have also examined those with whom "Moron" shared his share tips both inside and outside the *Mirror*. But whether they will press the button marked prosecute still seems unclear.

The DTI likes certainty about its prosecutions – which is why it did not go after the great story teller Jeffrey Archer. That is all that may save "Moron", even if it may not save his pals.

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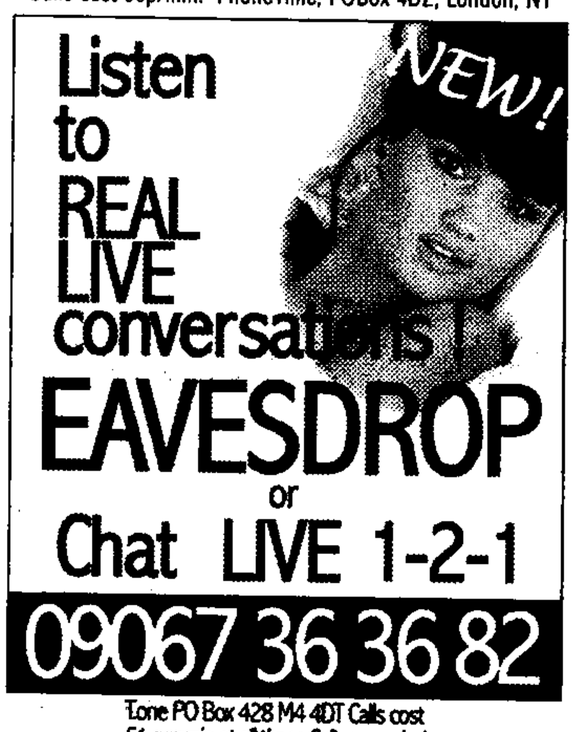
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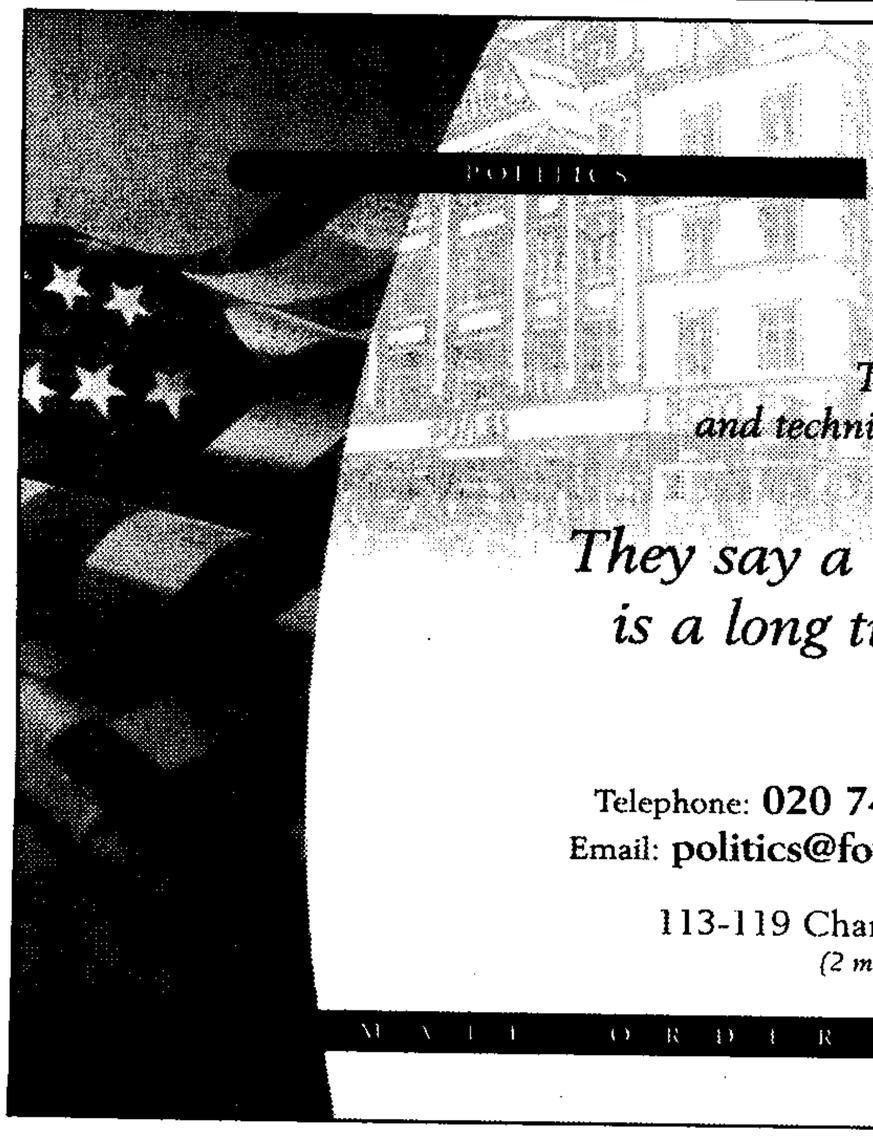
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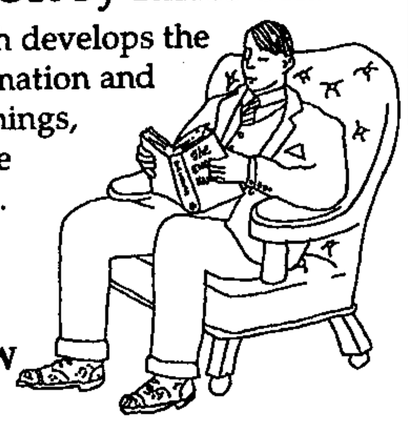

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YESHE KHANDRO. Lost health and home responding to humanitarian needs for 16 years. Needs house for peaceful study. Requiring meritorious action. H.S.B.C. 40-20-30, 91608614,

YOUNG ACADEMIC with high prospects desperately seeks help for school fees after parent's bankruptcy. Please. H.S.B.C. 40-46-39, 11394304.

STRUGGLING SONGWRITER in severe debt would appreciate any help in getting sorted. Thanks. H.S.B.C. 40-05-18, 91751476.

FAMILY. Both working all hours. Still owe £32,000. Facing bankruptcy. Please help. Thank you! Yorkshire Bank 05-03-03, 11032304.

DESPERATE single father needs urgent help with debts. TSB 77-12-18, 19102660.

TRAINEE SHRINK accident victim needs £15,000 to complete doctorate. Nat West 60-07-26, 70867569. Angels are with you.

YOUNG CLASSICAL MUSICIAN desperately needs funds to replace stolen instrument. Ulster Bank 98-00-17, 68903180, Box 1317

DISABLED WIDOW, small children, needs £300 to become self-employed. 30-99-86, 2100843.

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UNEMPLOYED black teenager needs suit, shoes, transport for job interview(s). 60-92-60, 13571982.

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VETERINARY STUDENT involved in international research on animal diseases facing severe financial difficulties seeks funds to continue studies. Halifax 11-04-22, 00371677.

SOS – desperate postgraduate requires philanthropic benefactor – writing-up thesis; creditors baying for repayment £5,000/anything required. 40-29-08, 12125242.

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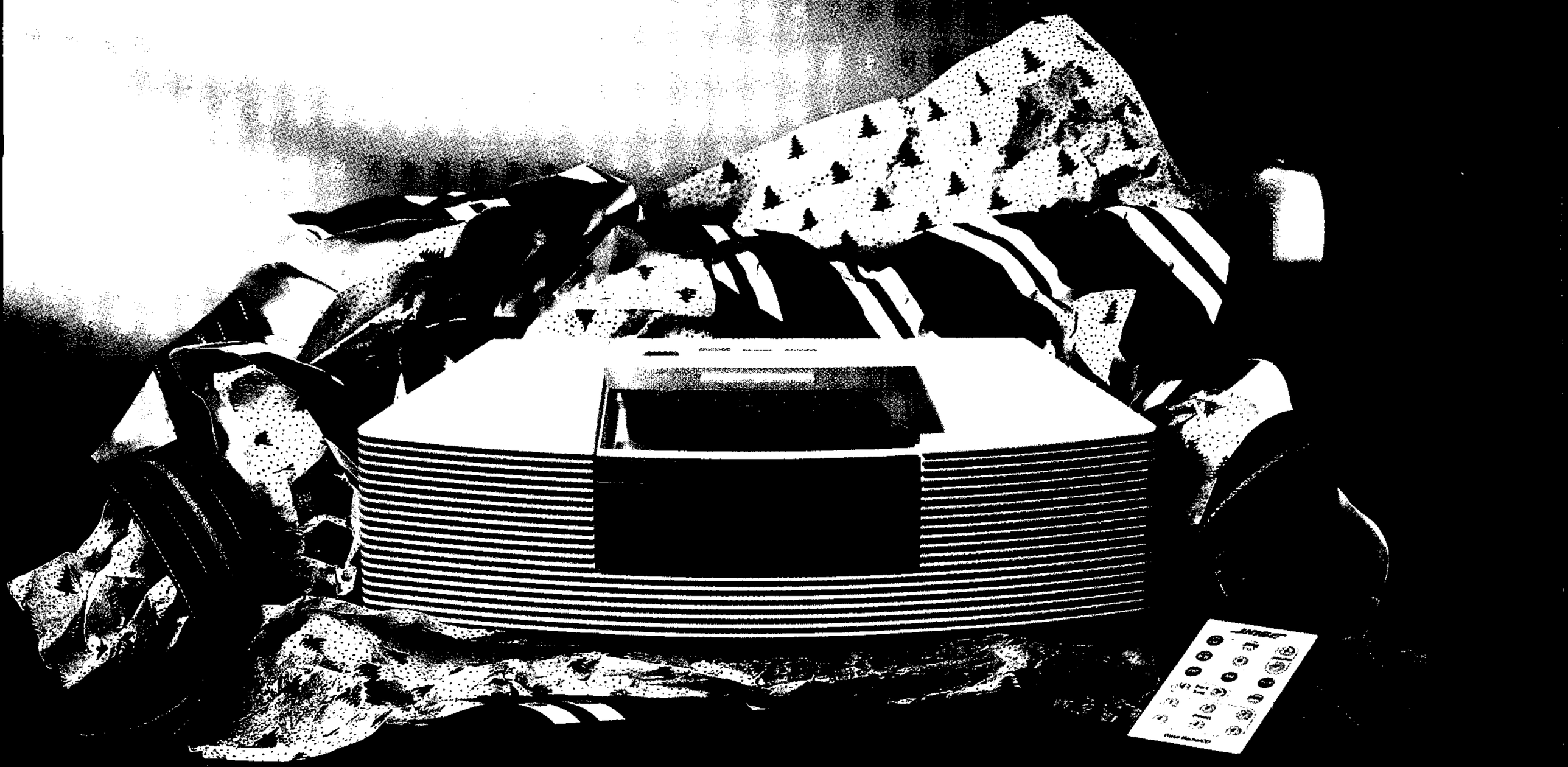

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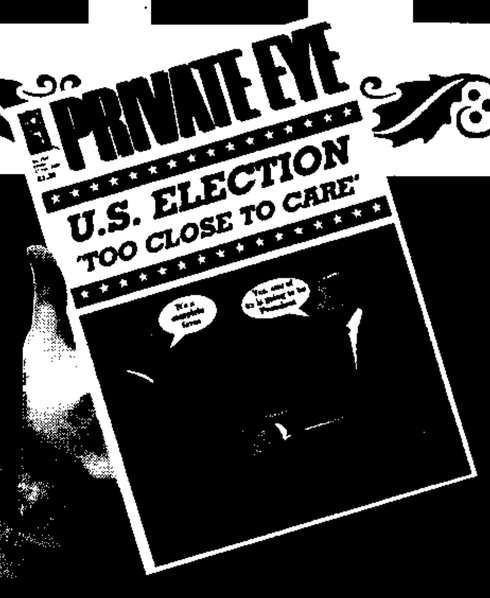

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